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LET THE EARTH SPEAK



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LET THE EARTH SPEAK



BY ANN STEWARD

NEW YORK

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1940

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Although the subject matter and setting of this book have been taken from life, the story and characters are wholly imaginary and do not refer to anyone living or dead. The names used are typical of the countryside: if any likeness should be found it is entirely coincidental.

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LET THE EARTH SPEAK

Letter of Introduction

When we came to Hayes El it was March—the fields curved dun-bare to stone-blue in the sky, and the sun lay cold-silvered on earth that was half frozen. The trees in the woodlands that profiled the farm were still winter-black, all contained within the lines of their trunks and their branches. The spring was making no visible break in earth or tree; yet all was in motion, both covered and revealed.

Outwardly this was of wind and of water. In the sky, wind brought whole cloud continents into appearance: piled mountains, hollowed valleys, carved inlets and then—levelled all to fleecy dust, layered deeply upon the horizon. On the land it created solid forms out of the trees with shapely strokes, but then shattered these into an infinite splintering of separate branches. But, whether created or destroyed, combined or stricken apart, all moved, vital with conflict.

And water vied with wind. The vales that were as shallows to the lower waves of the hills were plashy with mirroring lakes of it. From the higher lands that rose behind them like great heaving masses of heavier water, streams came pouring, with turbulence here and there seen but everywhere visibly heard: giving sound or a sense of it, as of blood pouring through veins, rushing to the speed of vertigo; giving pulse beat and flow, as within a body living.

This was the motion revealed; but there was another—covered—under the great palpable body of the earth, as it is

within one's own: that which brings outward gesture into being, the secretly organic, the nervous and muscular. What was seen was but such gesture as a man would make, waving arms and running; it was as nothing to the inner vital mechanics of force, tension, grip, that lifts arms and feet. Branches bending and springing back had more active counterpart in imaginable roots, hair-fine as human nerves are, that could be felt as something seen under ground, bearing the upward weight and giving direction and control to the movement with a power that was electric. And the great open veins of running water seemed but a gushing forth from far greater hidden arteries that went deep to its source in some living heart of the earth's life.

We who were coming—we were coming strange to life active in this way, outside us, and to the earth, living: each of the four of us, with a separate strangeness. Father came with the least, perhaps; for he had been country-born and of this country, Kentucky; and he had lived all the years of his boyhood in it. But longer and too long he had been away in service as a soldier, and had looked to the earth only as a field of maneuver, or a terrain of battle. In war he might have felt it alive shortly with all the young life-offering he had seen given it; but in memory it must have been lying dead with the death of this. Now all the livingness of the scene before us might have been as a resurrection for him; but for the rest of us—Janet and Dirk and myself—it was coming into its own existence for the first time. I knew that they shared something of my own birth-shock of such feeling by the way they reacted to it. Dirk retreated more defensively into himself; and Janet took fright that escaped her in one of the dramatic exclamations to which she was readily startled. How energetic it all looks! Janet said: How exhausting it is all going to be! (Janet was given to such single

word sophistications. How primeval! she would say. Or it might be: How prodigious, or precious, or putrid. But sometimes her words were apt enough, as this one for the scene before us. Energetic!)

It was not only because we others had lived in city-places paved and walled against such impression, but in these states become inward.

For us all, however, and for all our differences, Life—with our lives come to it—was in some new way active outside us. And Time was an event into which we were being swept on tides of wind and hill and pouring water. Hayes El, rising before us, embodied both like a great new Image of Life, with Time itself as its heartbeat, in the year's rhythm of four. In this rhythm our lives, with all Life, had come to Spring!

* * *

At our first sight of the place Father stopped the car and unbuttoned from the pocket of his uniform a letter, *the* Letter, that was bringing us here, was offering us as a gift Hayes El Farm and house for a year. He scanned it at first as if only to find the final directions to the house; but then he became involved in reading it again, deeply and silently, in a way in which it always involved him; and though Janet with her nervous impatience urged him on, he got out of the car instead, and walked away, reading . . .

Father was still in uniform on this day, shouldering the eagle of his last command. Where he stood, on an eminence of the road leading down into the great valley, looking from letter to land and back to letter again, he appeared to be inspecting terrain for a position in war rather than contemplating a pastoral homestead where he was to spend the first year of his retirement from the Army. His appearance bore

so military an aspect that Dirk the Ironic could not resist taunting him.

Where are the guns to be placed, Colonel, for the widest slaughter? he called through the wind to him.

And then, as he himself looked into the restless valley, Dirk mocked all our reasons for coming here, in what he said of Father.

— And he is retiring here for the peace of it all, the first peace he has known!

For myself, I did not see Father in this ironic way nor feel this mockery, although, with my one twin-likeness to Dirk, I had been given hardly less than he to it in the past. I saw Father quite differently: taking root in this place while he stood there, some strong silent root native in him for the earth. And in this rooting there was peace for him: he was even in this moment touching upon it as the earth's own firmness to growth, underlying this turbulence of time and life over it.

My sight, however, was not my own, either of Father or of the earth around him. I was looking at both through the words of the Letter he was reading, words that were as eyes themselves through which I was seeing, with this difference. I knew the pages Father had read to me by very heart; for strangely, from the beginning, their words were as some scripture within myself, not written in the mind as thought is, but beaten out in the heart in rhythms of some new feeling. I knew but the smallest part; for the Letter was long, half the length of a novelette, with the life-material of three in it. (As novelist myself I could feel such material there: like a physician to words, I knew when life was in them. This sense at least had not yet died in me!) Yet in what I knew I could feel the whole contained, just as in the heart all life is contained in each beat, with duration resolved into

intensity. Father had promised to read more to me, and I was all one strung eagerness to hear it; but it was only an eagerness of mind to share the heart's previous knowledge: to have, as it were, this explained and elaborated to it.

In any case Father was reading the part I knew, the first page, as he stood there; and I could follow him word by word:

News of your retirement brings me to a time in your life as to one in my own, a time of freedom to make a return that once we promised each other we would make, when the time came. Now for you, as not for me, it has come; and so I am writing this to ask you to make it for me, as well as for yourself.

It may be you have forgotten it, for almost I had, myself. I must confess that the two men we were then, you Major Jarrell and I Captain Hayes, had faded into the two men we went back into being after that night of death in which the promise was made between us. With the title dropped for me and changed for you, the scene fell away, and all that remained was the promise itself, out of connection, isolated in time and all outward sequence, and with the inner one broken for me by the life to which I returned. I had begun to feel that it was a promise not to be fulfilled in life, but only in death; and that you and I had survived that night of war not to keep it but to break it. When, through the years, news of your continued life in the Army drifted in to me—your advancement to a colonelcy—it seemed to cut the last thin thread of connection, as if forever. But now, as I hear of your retirement, the whole scene of that night of death, in which we lived through death together, emerges like something intact, every detail of it vividly and absolutely remembered; and it connects itself to the time that has come for you, and for me through you, as if this time

were the morrow of that night. In the very moment that this takes place in me—before doubt of you or myself can set in upon it!—I am writing: to offer you such a place as the one we spoke of on that night, and such a return made . . . by one of us . . . the first one to be free . . .

* * *

I could have gone on with the Letter, remembering for myself what followed, about the place itself, Hayes El; but now Father turned back to the car, to read about the more specific description of it. Not getting into the car yet, but leaning through a half-opened window, he read:

The house lies in an ascending valley. At first you will not see it, for it stands at an angle of the road and the land. This is how it got its name, the 'El' part of it. As for the 'Hayes,' that is for my uncle from whom I inherited it: Old Hayes. His life is the life of the place, still, though he is dead. If you miss your way between Hayesville and Hayesboro, ask anyone—he owned all this except a few holdings. Just say Old Hayes, and you will find, though dead he still lives!

It must be just around the bend, Father said, and then looked across the valley again, speaking rather than reading on from the Letter, and softly, as if to himself:

The shape of the place is its name. You will feel my uncle's hand upon it all, creating, bringing it to be, shaping the very contours of the hills as well as the houses . . .

And then a part of the Letter he had not yet read to us escaped him as he stood there; he mused upon it aloud—a sudden, impassioned part, lyric with longing:

Go for me, Colonel, answer the call the place is making to me this year as no other. Give the house and the hills the life I have taken from them. Buy sheep and cattle, give them to the fields' emptiness. And buy horses worthy of Kentucky,

as you know horses and Kentucky! Pasture them in the fields laid out for horses, of grass rooted to the rock of this land as no other, for their feeding. Bring sound to the hills once more, of a horse ridden. Above all, ride the lane that goes to the house, and commit the sound to me as you ride it. For of all sounds remembered, of all paths made in my mind and my heart . . . hoofbeats on that road . . .

But now Janet could stand no more of all this: of Father's detachment; or the contemplation of the scene before her, or of the Letter.

Oh, stop, Larry, stop! she cried. It all sounds so involved, so frightfully involved!

Again her word was apt. Involved!—in another's life, another's longing.

Dirk too was becoming impatient.

This close to the place, he said drily, I think we might see it instead of reading about it.

Yet Father was not hurried. He got back into the car and drove on, but slowly, taking time himself and giving it to us, to reflect from the scene before us, how we had come to it, what was bringing us . . .

Again from the Letter I took my own reflection—from those words, *night of death*. For such a night, in some degree of its meaning in the Letter, lay closely behind Dirk and myself; and in it was the need that was bringing us to this 'return' of Father's. Bringing? But the better word would be 'driving'! For in our youth, and the peculiar indurate independence of Father we had maintained until now, we had need in body and in soul to be driven. He had lived apart from us, children of the birth-death of our mother, almost all our lives—separated from us at first by his life in the Army and afterward by a second marriage. Only a month before this day of our coming to Hayes El, he had returned

to us, to offer us a home—this one offered him—and himself as father. Even now he had not come alone but had brought a third wife—Janet, of all women in the world! Had our need for him been a shadow less than it was, we would have refused him out of very resentment that he had not come alone. But as it was . . . night of death . . . Yes! These were the words for it: Dirk's night, almost Dirk's death, that I had suffered not only with him but in him, as the divided part of myself he seemed to be. And it lay so close to the time of Father's return, but one month before it, that Dirk and I were barely out of it. We had gone to meet Father feeling bared back to our very birth to him, with a kind of infant need . . .

Dirk had had an accident in a car, and his right arm had been torn from him. These were the words for it: *accident, almost death, right arm gone*. But they did not begin to tell what had been stripped from Dirk with that arm; what, in him, had been bound to it: all his hope of life, his approach to it, his one strength for its mastery; all his imagination. (Nor even do these words tell of it!) Dirk was an architect, artist of that art that is so uniquely an embodied one, both in the forms it takes and in the source of their inspiration in the artist; and that has its craft so intricately bound to the fingers. His loss as architect was greater than if he had been painter or poet; for in these the art has moved more toward detachment, outside the artist, and lives there, and gives itself back in reflection. It is not so in architecture: here there is more immediacy—its terms are all of time and material, dimension and weight. Its contacts are direct from mind to hand, and hand to space. An arm and a hand lost mean a contact broken, a mediumship impaired. It was worse for Dirk . . . at this time it seemed hopeless.

And then, as if this night of his were not enough, I had

suffered one of my own. Of less finality, mine: only the failure of my last book. Almost nothing it seemed, the while I suffered Dirk's. And yet it too was of night and death; for I could not see beyond the block of that book—it was like some dark thing lying in the path of my life forward. And within me there was an emptiness peculiar to death. My night was one of the mind—all seemed laid waste there, all was blank where so much had been written. By now I was knowing that it was not just a temporal emptiness, not an ebb-tide of a creative flowing that I was used to, in shorter alternations; but a change of shoreline within, a never-returning. As if Dirk's accident had swept me into new deeps of being that were self-wordless, I looked back upon how I was before, and upon what I had written, as a river might look back upon a strand after it had found a new unfathomed channel of rock for its flowing.

Night of death? These were the words for what bound Dirk and me to Father and this coming of ours with him to Hayes El. But what of Janet? How had she come to be here with us? What *could* bind her to Father and this time of his life, this one time of peace and freedom in his life? Considering Janet again—so alien, distraught, artificial—I remembered that once she had said, in one of her dramatic exclamations: 'If you could know what he saved me from, that night in Paris!' Was it possible then, that even Janet had glimpsed some measure of night and death beyond the last artifice of her living? This was remotely conceivable in the moment, as it had not been before.

As for Father . . . All was question about him, and all was wonder. The Letter had brought it all into the focus of its words. War, and how he could be surviving it within himself. And all the rest that lay darkly behind him: death of a first wife, divorce of a second, and now Janet . . . There was

something about him so detached from it all, living in some kind of freedom and peace and—promise, yes, that was it (word from the Letter again): *promise*, and one not just for himself but for us all!

* * *

But now we had come into sight of Hayes El House: there it lay before us, all revealed, putting an end to every other wonder. The shape of the place *was* its name! And it was as if the hand of a man had given it to land and house. The gesture of such a hand was everywhere, vivid and active, laying hold of the angled road and the house, sharpening them to some inner decision.

On an ascending hill . . . to a bend in the turnpike, and at the end of a lane leading to it from the angle. The house itself was right-angled—two houses, really, put together, with the lane lying like a straight shaft to the point of their coming together. It was all made of wood—house, sheds, cabins, barns and all fences: wind-bent, loose-boarded, time-mouldering, but with the living look wood keeps in its decay. Fences, five-planked in the tradition of Kentucky, surrounded the house-yard and fields alike. They were freshly white-washed for the year beginning; but their age came deep-grained through the white like wrinkles on a powdered old face. There was an order in all the buildings of a living convenience and design: they squared off the barn lot on two sides with regularity, but this was not merely architectural. Their distances apart seemed so many steps actually taken, measured in the beginning by a man walking, and afterward followed through a century, until they were forever imprinted here, earth and air bearing the record. All, all was bound together by such invisible steps taken: where there were arbors connecting the houses, or walks paved, or only

stones; or where there were just footprints or worn places on the grass. All was bound, and by movement.

Nor did the house stand with unliving stillness. It leaned to its years on the stones of its foundation; and it looked from them with the color-gleams of old eyes, through filmy small-paned windows, thick-glassed, as with strong spectacles. They were eyes in the moment of vacancy, looking out from empty years behind them; but they seemed only to be waiting to be filled up again, with vision from within, or reflection from without, of a returning life to the house.

And the lane to it! This 'path made as no other . . .' Though laid as a rod to the house, both sides lined closely by an uprightness of trees, it wavered in its straightness to sides that were quaggy; and the trees planted along it—pines of a lofty lateral growth—moved in a sway of column under their roofing of interlayered branches. Here too, that inherent movement, active beneath what outwardly conveyed it.

Father stopped at the gate to the lane, saying: We had better walk it; it looks soft, and besides . . .

In what he did not say was the suggestion of his other and inner reason: to get the feel of the road, walking it; to make a foot approach to the house, slowly, with deference for the way it was into another man's life. And I could feel that he wanted to see it apart from the rest of us, with only this man in mind. He got out, quite forgetful of Janet, and he went ahead free of her complaint: But it is a perfect bog of a road, it will ruin my suede slippers!

From the side of the lane I was taking, apart from him, I saw with new amazement the closer countenance of the place: a giant rise of hill behind it, close and immediate, bearing down upon the house with a magnificence of forest—with trees ancient to the house's great age. My eyes rose

to the hill's height, and I lost breath for a moment, as its huge and sudden nearness was brought nearer by the leaning and bending of the trees in the wind. My eyes came to rest then, on the striking contrast of soft pasture land that was cleared and unfenced to the forest's boundary, and shouldered it all with a bared ease and grace of supple body-lines. This rose directly from the west wing of the house, upward, out of sight where we were walking. It was white-fenced and divided into several paddocks—such pasture as that spoken of in the letter, laid out for horses, with grass rooted to the rock of this state as no other, Kentucky bluegrass. Even now, where the other fields were dun, it showed a stain of green close to the earth. An imagination of horse was here, even for me; but I was not held by it, as Father was, but felt urged on ahead, into one of my own . . .

For me it was this lane to which I was coming home: there was only the lane suddenly, and I walking it with some new sensibility in my feet. It seemed to draw into itself all the livingness of the whole place, to connect the outer scene with one inward, making of itself a Way of Life, through Time . . . Some time, perhaps, this happens to all of us—this merging of outer and inner existences—and we live for a moment in their connection, in a way striking with revelation of likeness and meaning. Some time in our lives has only to become intense enough, and some event bear such semblance, as this Road had now for me . . .

Before me it lay, quiet and deep and level under its trees: road where for a century cows had come home and sheep been driven. It was secret with sound of all that had passed over it—beat of hoof, yes, and fall of rain and of snow, and even of leaf, echo in it even of the soundless. My feet falling upon its stones struck sound out of this secrecy, struck vision and voice within, where only thought had been. And

all for a moment became like something seen in a mirror with two selves, the one seeing and the other seen; and like something heard from a cavern opening to my tread. From the end of the lane I saw myself coming up it, with all I was bringing—the years of my youth from nineteen to twenty-nine, of my quick, precocious, exhaustive writing. I saw the four books already written, and my name given them, my bookish name Julia Jarrell, signed Jay . . . My feet, falling upon the road, evoked from it with mockery the words of their reviews: *precious, stylistic, disillusioned, cerebral*. And the Road seemed to speak, asking: *What are you coming here for, what will you find in stones and mud, in grass and stars, for your pen to plunder?*

But I have not come to plunder, my thought answered, *I've come . . . lived empty and so written*.

Still it taunted: *Not to write? when I am in this moment words in your mind?*

Again my thought protested of itself: *Words with a difference, words speaking*.

It informed me of this difference: of the *word* speaking, from outside me, as with voice of its own, as if life there had such voice. Of this difference from the *cerebral*, the mere word-magician'ship, the words unforgettable in themselves but with their reference soon forgotten. The Road, speaking again, echoed the review: *Words wanting a living reference*. And it went on to say of itself: *Yet all the while I have been here, waiting for you . . . a living way, made of the substance of earth, mud and stone, sunlight and star, the one living way, continuous through time, original of all the life that has passed over me, bearing its witness . . .*

I grew in wonder at the thought. I wondered: Can it be that Time and Earth, and one's own life bound to them, bear a history of their own, and that one has only to hear it? that

life might write a different story of itself from any that man writes of it? and were a man to let it speak to him he would have his own truer story?

My thought was all wonder; it rayed from me as light for a moment, it was like this—light within, dawning. (It did not take place in these words; they are only my interpretation of it afterward.) Those boundaries of my personal emptiness broke to it, as night breaks to dawn, or winter to spring; and all things around me—road, trees, and house with hill and forest overhanging it—poured into me with some fullness of their own. Only one realization in words emerged in the moment: my answer to the Road's question of my coming, repeated, as a challenge taken up, and a promise given. *No, Road, no! Not to write, but to be written into!*

* * *

— Try this side, Julia. It's firmer.

Father was calling into my wonder, from the other side of the lane, and from behind me. He did not break its inner enchantment but only diverted it, to himself. Looking back, I saw him as I had seen myself coming toward me. The sharp sun, the form-shattering air struck through the rigid outlines of his bearing, and I saw—his body supple and bent, as with adoration or humility, beneath the militant carriage; bent as the trees were, above him, to forces active in this time and this place for a new creativeness, that, for the soul of man as for seed and branch, was perpetually germinal . . . And as he walked I saw those lines of soldiery that had always been in invisible attendance upon him fade away, his uniform and command with them. Under these he appeared in the ancient robe of shepherd; and going before him, gently driven, was a flock of sheep. He walked alone;

and it was evening in his life. Without wives dead or living, and without children, I saw Father coming to this place—somewhere in himself—alone.

What then, of Janet? While such vision might hold, I looked to her where she was picking a high-heeled way from stone to stone. But it must be true as I have heard: that vision is only born of love; and only of this, understanding. No further revelation of Janet came, beyond that one of a spiritual shadow of night hovering to this return with Father. I only saw more clearly what I disliked about her: all those self-accentuations of color she made, from her speech to the tint of her hair. I saw these, rather: the hair that was still beautifully dark in itself, but was yet given, with her exaggeration, an extra raven beauty; the face that was pretty, yes, with its odd violet eyes, and the girl-small and fine features, but too pretty, empty of the life-fullness that should be in it; and the clothes—a sophistry of gray and violet, the mauve hue of sophistication. Only these exaggerations of delicacy and refinement I saw, these dramatics of sensibility . . . too clearly . . .

I turned quickly from her to Dirk, who was sullenly holding back from us all. But, for all my love, I still could only see in Dirk—his sullenness, his holding back, his armless thinking: I am only coming here because I have no other place to go. This is just a good empty place to drain my bitterness into—this year just so much time to be beaten until I can learn to make the change from right to left, if ever I can learn to make it.

Yet I did not despair for Dirk. All our lives he had been my opposite in all ways, as his being man was to my woman-ness. (Can this be a truth of twins, that they are as a sun-dered self, be it with difference or likeness?) He was the silence of all the words to which I had given utterance in

those four books; the doubt of all my quick, forced certainties. So would he be now the willful blindness of my new seeing. Besides, one hope, this hope I was taking, was enough for both of us. I held it cherished for him as for myself: hope, of new imagination given the written word and the drawn line: as Father, catching up to me, spoke again into the enchantment, still not breaking it, but diverting it now to the house immediately before us.

* * *

If only there were someone to open the door! he said, taking the key from the envelope of the Letter: I thought there would be servants, but it looks as if no one . . .

The house indeed looked emptiness and silence upon us, this close to it. Father talked on, as if to give time to someone, to come:

— Hayes spoke of an old negro woman in one of the cabins, and half a dozen daughters. Then there is a white family on the place, with a daughter who looks after things for him.

Now he said more outright what he was inwardly feeling:

— If only I did not have to open that door myself! It's a deuce of a thing to do after all, Jay: take another man's house in this way, and a man you hardly know, or that you know only in one way—as hardly—you know yourself.

Father rallied with effort out of this implication of his thought and took a good, firm, military step toward the door.

I don't know what to expect, he said; I only know—Hayes is a very rich man, this is one of several homes he has, and the least one. He has been away for many years, comes just one week or so a year to hold it by a condition in his uncle's will.

He put the key to the lock now, but slowly, as if still to give someone time to come. And he went on talking:

— You know, Jay, you know he is coming while we are here, don't you, to fulfill this requirement? Did I read that part to you, about his coming some time this year?

No, you did not, I said. I remember vividly all you have read. You've been pretty sketchy about it.

Well, he said almost with embarrassment: There were so many—intimate things all through it, I mean intimate to an experience we had together that might be hard for another . . .

I had to smile a little at this floundering: this, in one so used to giving the unequivocal command! This way of murmuring Father had: it was another contradiction new to me in him, of person to profession.

He caught something in my smile, perhaps the new warmth of love I was feeling for the part that was not Soldier, and he rewarded it with:

— But some day I'll show you more of it. It is all so extraordinary; it reads like a story. Hayes is something of a writer himself, you know.

— No, I didn't know. Of Captain Hayes himself you have said almost nothing.

But this was not the way to urge him. He withdrew from the difficulty with a sigh:

— It is a very long story. We will all have to live here to understand.

Then he turned the key, with another sigh: Well, since no one seems to be coming . . .

And he opened the tall white door that was itself severely sightless.

Threshold of another man's life, I said, standing this side of it, feeling it to be this so vividly that I—stood this side.

Or one's own as another's, Father said, from just one step across it, within the bright wedge of the door's opening. Then he urged me to come in, before the others . . .

Then I . . . and more vividly . . . this threshold! Like the road it became, at the same time, inward. Only this was into another's life, and to cross it was like stepping out of my own. *Go in my place*, the Letter said. Now I as well as Father seemed to be under the command of those words: he who had written them was a voice speaking, was a presence all surrounding me where I stood just inside the door, looking the length of the great hall that ran the full depth of the house outward, through another door. For the moment I could not speak or move as myself: I was within his presence, so small that I could not move it that was much larger. It was not wholly inward, this presence: from the atmosphere of the house it took on a certain physical tangibility—an odor of leather and tobacco; and it had imaginable features.

With intensity it lasted but a moment, holding me to the door; but even when I was able as myself to move down the hall, it lingered, and my first question sought confirmation of it.

—What does Captain Hayes look like?

Father was startled from some silence, some standing-still of his own. But he answered me, with sudden unaccustomed volubility:

—He is very tall, as I recall, with a kind of acquired British look about him from years of living in England, but with something else quite individual, that made him stand out from all my other men. He came to my battalion after we got into the war from service in the British artillery, and from the first I was attracted to something quite—outstanding. Individual, I mean . . .

Father was running out of this rare volubility toward that inevitable murmur that seemed to lie in wait for all he could say about Captain Hayes. At the same time he was walking about the hall as if searching for something. It was quite dark: the hall lay in a dusk of closed rooms on both sides of it, lighted but dimly at one end by two windows that were roofed over, outside, by a wide porch. Nothing could be seen on the walls but what was largely hanging there: some stag antlers and pictures of horses, huge old prints fading into indistinctness.

Perhaps there is a picture of him here somewhere, Father said. I am afraid I have more of an impression than an actual memory. You'd better open some of those doors for light, Jay, before Janet gets here, while I . . .

He went into action in place of words, trying to open the rear door to the porch. It stuck hard against repeated effort. My doors were easier to open and yet difficult—each a door into another room of this man's life, with some scene of it dimly living within. It was a house that had been left exactly as it had been lived in, nothing stored or packed away, all out for use and ready. I remember that somewhere in the Letter it was written: *You will find it completely furnished, you need take nothing at all with you. Hardly your clothes. For you will find some of these too, and in several man sizes, hanging in the presses. Not for your womenfolk, however, if you have womenfolk. For no women have lived in this house for thirty-odd years—my mother was the last, and she died when I was but ten . . .*

It was indeed this way: with books, ornaments, lamps crooked for reading beside chairs: all out for use and ready. I had such impression as I opened the first door to a library: It is still, but it is only waiting. I could go in and sit in that chair and not have so much to do as to change the position

of it to window or lamp. But if I should go there I would not be myself, I would be filling up another's form, waiting invisibly.

It would be a man's form, I felt; but not this one at the door—no, there is another, smaller and wider, in that room, in those odd squat chairs.

I just left the door open, without going in, and took a few steps down the hall to the next room. Father was still trying to open the end door that was stoutly sticking even to the strength and decision of his military attack upon it. And now Janet was coming, all one exclamation: How stuffy! How—how stuffed it all is, it is positively taxidermic!

Dirk behind her, mocking her inordinate ejaculation of 'How,' said of the hall and its heavy balance of rooms on both sides: How arbitrary of architecture.

The rear door gave to Father's lifting. He opened it, and wind and light swept one path through the room, bringing the wet freshness of the land into—Janet was right again—the somewhat taxidermic smell in the hall. It came down from the cleared field that rose almost immediately back of the house to the dark brow of the forest. It was both freshly and stalely damp: one could scent the moistness of many year-layers of rotting leaves in it. Janet caught the scent with:

— Just as I thought! It is going to be damp; I shall have my neuralgia here! It is going to be horribly passé, everything, all the odors, outside and in. Really, Larry, I'm afraid it is going to be horrible with age. Look at this furniture!

She was examining what she could in that single path of light.

It is just old, she said, without being period. It is just old, and things that are that way . . .

She shuddered: Why in heaven's name did you come here when we might have had such a gay little apartment somewhere? It is like taking another man's life upon yourself, all its years added to your own.

She shuddered again; and just for a moment I saw her with that other vision. It is Time, I thought in this flash of seeing, the thing that does not pass but lives and accumulates and is, all of it, in every minute: this is her fright, the night of it lying behind her. But Father has only brought her to more of it here!

But now, with the front and the back door open, and the one to the library and the room behind it, there was enough light in the hall to look for pictures. Father and I moved on opposite sides to the search, feeling it urgent before going farther into the house. Dirk stood with feet widely apart as if he were trying to get some feeling of the house's architecture through the medium of his whole body. Dirk always stood contemplative of a building in this way, as if to feel its weight and measure, its balance and proportions somehow in himself. That is why, with his arm gone . . . His loss was as one of eye to a painter, or ear to a musician.

Janet had sat down in a low and crooked rocker that was old, very old, but out of all period. She sat picturesque of its discomfort, making herself so, almost deformed by its want of ease and grace.

— You see, Larry, it is even worse than I thought, it is all utterly abandoned!

But Father just went on looking for the picture. He even began to open drawers, quoting such permission from the Letter: *Feel free to open any drawer, box, or cupboard: the house is wholly yours, all family residue. Do not hesitate before any intimacy . . .*

Here! Father cried, finding one: It is only of him as a boy, but it is like him as I recall, only younger, though of course by now . . .

He took it to the better light of the open front door, and I followed, with pressure of all my eagerness to see. It was the picture of a boy, perhaps sixteen, overtall, and with too much breadth of shoulder for a very lean face that was somehow delicate and strong at the same time, almost girl-lovely with youth and an overfairness of skin and hair, but with a firm central stroke of feature, from brows drawn inward to keen eyes, and a long prominently boned nose, and a mouth held pointed to it.

It is he! Father cried. Only he was still taller, and his face longer. But it is the same face—very fine and sensitive, and, you see, Jay—individual in this peculiar length.

I looked eagerly for the features of that image. Janet did not come to see, nor Dirk. Father and I were one, and apart from them, looking.

It is better to have a picture of him as a boy, Father said, for it is the boy we will find here. He left not long after this age to go to Oxford; and he stayed on in England, and married there, and then the War came. It is the boy we will find here, he says that in the Letter.

And Father went for it, in his pocket.

Good heavens! Janet cried. Must we have more of that? And must we have the door open to see in this place? My neuralgia! Please, someone, close that awful door in the back.

Dirk with mocking gallantry went to shut it; for Father stood in the sun of the open front door, all unmindful of Janet, reading . . .

Here it is, he said with unabashed eagerness. And he read: *You will only find the boy here, of whom we spoke on*

that night. He left at nineteen never to return as a man except for one week or so a year. Only the boy; but in finding him you will find that only truly living part . . .

Father stopped reading with: I'm afraid this is—it might be hard to understand out of—of context.

Where the Letter invariably bored Janet, it irritated Dirk.

But what is it all about? he asked again: What has he left, what is here? So far all I can see is a barracks of an old house furnished with stuff that, as Janet says, has no period. And outside a lot of marshy land and forest. In the name of common sense what does he mean, what has he left, what is he sending us to?

But Father did not have to answer. For, through the open door he was seeing, and he called us to see, someone coming up the lane.

Someone? But it seemed rather an apparition!—of a girl flying rather than walking, her form and movement one with the blowing branches and their shadows through which she came, interweaving. It was the way she came, her being all in movement: with head carried far back, full sun on her face, her hair blown wholly free of it; with a light blue volume of dress in full drift to one side and her body swaying after it; and with something under her arms, white and billowy, that gave sail to her coming.

Dirk asked: Can it be a girl?—with all of our wonder for a moment. She seemed too light and mobile, too blue and white, for human embodiment. Janet was the first to bring her wings to earth.

They're curtains! she discovered. Probably she is only the laundress.

Then Father identified her, from the Letter: It must be Zayda.

And he quoted: *The daughter of the white family on the*

place is Zayda. She will serve you in the house if you wish, though you will find her far more than a servant. I will not tell you about her, I will leave her for your own discovery—except for this: you will find simple and original in her what you and I had almost to die on that night to glimmer.

Her approach interrupted what he said, but he would have stopped in any case with that reference. Now she was almost before us, clear of the trees, and I saw: her movement was not only an illusion of shadow and light in the wind, it was a way of her own of walking: with both a rushing forward and a holding back, in alternations of eagerness and hesitancy. When she began to speak before she had quite reached us, she spoke as she walked: now with warm free impulse to speak, with impulsive fluency, but then with breath caught before her next words.

Oh, she gasped, I am Zayda. I am so sorry—about not being here—nor having the house open.

Now she was standing below us, out of all shadow, face upturned farther to the sun, closely seen of a clarity that was its own: of brow and eye and very white skin; the lips pale, almost a faint blue, but colored perfectly within the picture of its singular purity. More than a servant? But yes, and how much more! I marvelled at the sight of her, slowly finding its likeness. It was the face of a primitive Madonna, with its elongated oval broadened at the brow; and the chin very small and pointed; and with all its features in some inward composure. A Fra Angelico Madonna, with that all-contained look of motherhood about her. Her hair that was center-parted and worn in a coronet shone as a kind of halo and completed the picture. But all this was more than a picture, a likeness. I did not think: She is like this; but, She is this. I felt being and image bound in her from this first sight, as I had never felt it in any other. To see was to feel this

broad serenity of her brow, this detached meditation of her eyes, and the benign smiling that gathered from her whole nature to her lips. *I will leave her for your own discovery!*

Father was the first to rally from the surprise that held us all. He moved to her, spoke, introducing us; and then he took the white burden of the curtains she carried. It might only have been from his ready gallantry; but I think rather that he wanted to take the wings from the picture to see if it would remain the same.

She did not change. Without the filmy spread of the curtains she only stood as with wings withdrawn, poised for flight. Again she spoke, and her voice was one with her appearance.

I'm sorry, she said more steadily with her body's own poise, but we didn't know just when to expect you. Mister Kirtley said some time in March. We got the house all cleaned up; but the curtains, they . . .

Remembering them, and her coming as servant to us, she said: Oh, please! I'll take them, and I'll hang them for you at once; they make such a difference in the house.

She waited as servant until we should go before her. By her attitude she compelled us to go first, even Father, though he held back. Please, she seemed to be saying, please. I prefer it this way. Not humble, or in any way servile, but by preference. (She will serve you, will serve, will serve . . . The words filled up with her being as she was in the moment.)

With an alternation of fluency she went on: It is such a man's house. No woman's hand has been upon it for years, saving on the curtains.

She stopped in the center of the hall to pile them on a couch, and to spread one pair for us to see this one touch of a woman upon the house. In spite of herself Janet was charmed.

Embroidered batiste! she exclaimed. They must have cost a fortune.

They're from Altman's, Zayda said with a kind of awe of the place in her voice. And they are batiste. Mister Kirtley's wife only came once in all the years he has himself come back, and that once she brought them. Before she came, no woman had been here since Mister Kirtley's mother died. But even when she lived here Old Hayes did too, and wherever *he* was, *his* was the touch.

She laughed at herself, talking so fully: Here I am, trying to tell it all in one breath, as Mister Kirtley says of me. But I do want you to know this, the house can be brightened. The curtains will help, I'll hang them at once.

And with the pair in hand she darted into the open door of the first room.

We had said almost nothing; but she had been letting her glance flash from one to another. I felt, with that sensitivity of the road and the threshold, that in ways we had yet to know ourselves she was in the moment beginning to know us. Now a certain vision came into her face that bore the same fullness her voice had; and also it contained its own opposites. It was both keen and dreamy, foreseeing and reflective. Yet there was no contradiction, only alternation to be felt.

Her glances were the very movements she went on to make, in hanging the curtains: rush, pause, almost absolute stillness, then rush again. In a flash she had a chair before one of the front windows, upon it a large dictionary, and upon this herself with a pair of the curtains. There she stood poised, as if for flight. And so she went on talking:

No, she said to her own sequence of talking: No, this is not the right one. They are all alike and yet different; curtains always are, and so are windows, especially the windows

of this old house. It has leaned out of all straightness. Would you please?

But before we could appraise how they were hung she had jumped off the book, looked at them herself, and was back again for the adjustment. She went on talking about the curtains:

— No matter how you do them up, they wont hang straight. Now these. I gave a full hour to a pair, ironing them. You have to treat them like an embroidery piece and do the scallops and flowers under brown paper. Is it straight now, please?

She looked to Janet, smiling: Please? Men wouldn't know one way or another.

Utterly! Janet said, caught off guard and involved in the hanging of the curtains.

Then, flash, another pair from the pile, and up on the chair and the book again. But now Dirk, before Father, rallied from whatever charm the sight was having for him to say brusquely:

— Look here, let me hang them for you, I can do it without all that equipment.

He had forgotten his arm! He had taken a pair from her and was trying with one hand to slide rod into hook before he remembered. I knew just when the memory came: when he was ready to drop curtain to floor with that quick despair of his, and stalk away to hide the dark return of it. But just in that moment she held him where he was.

— Oh, thank you, it will save time, you are so tall—almost as tall as Mister Kirtley, and he's a perfect ladder for hanging things.

Somehow as she spoke Dirk managed to slip in one side of the rod. She went on talking smoothly, as if to cover his

awkwardness; yet not obviously, only with a kind of ease for us all.

— You'll see, all over the house, half the pictures are hung high out of sight, and half low, in the same way. Half are Mister Kirtley, and half, Old Hayes. You'll see, in the hall. Those of the steeplechases are high—they're Mister Kirtley. But the others of horses—and almost all the pictures are of horses—they're low, and they are Old Hayes. They are photographs or drawings he had made of mares and their foals. Races—those are Mister Kirtley. Colts—Old Hayes.

I heard in effect: high, Mister Kirtley; low, Old Hayes: steeplechases and mares. But I was looking closely at her the whole while, with my first impression deepening and becoming confirmed. Like a Madonna! Something in relation to Dirk, his lost arm, his menacing despair; and to all of us, as if to one thing or another each of us had lost too, and were coming here without: something of the Madonna, of a detachment of other-wisdom, a calm and tender and compassionate surveying of us all as child . . . I found myself resting my own anxiety for Dirk upon her in the moment, as something in myself began also to lean.

Now see, she said as she straightened the curtain Dirk had hung: Now do see how much better the room looks. This side of the house is pretty dark, the hill rises so closely to it; but the other side stands clearer to the sun. This is the original side, and it is Old Hayes—he wanted it close to the earth so that he was never without the feeling of it. But he built the other side for Mister Kirtley's mother, he had to, to get her to stay here at all. You'll find it quite cheery. And Mister Kirtley said I was to get cretonnes if you wanted them, hangings and covers for the chairs and couches.

We were moving into the next room, Zayda assuming that

Dirk would go on hanging curtains, no matter what the effort. She had waved Father aside when he had offered to help.

See! she said again, pointing to the chairs and couches in a second parlor: Do see how it is all a man's house. There is hardly any one room you can call one thing or another—there will be a couch or some books or some odd kind of table to make you think it is something else. In the dining room, now, there are couches and books! The books are Mister Kirtley, not Old Hayes: he had little need for books, it was all in his hands. But the couches are his. Old Hayes always did the work of four men, he had to have a couch where he needed it and when, else he did not get rest enough. And these low chairs with the legs cut off—they are Old Hayes too. He was as short-legged as Mister Kirtley is long; he is the only short man in the family; but then Old Hayes was different in every way, he was only himself. I am sure there was no one ever in any way like him—no, really, you will understand when you come to know . . . But do look at that chair, and that one: he'd cut legs or arms off the best mahogany furniture to get it to fit him!

She had led us back to the hall, leaving Dirk with the last of the curtains she had brought in the dining room, so called, though it might indeed have been a library with a hanging shelf of books over a sideboard of dishes! It was as she said: one thought of a room, this must be the library; but no, it was the dining room. She surveyed the room now with:

— You can rearrange it all. Mister Kirtley said you'd probably want to. He always left it as it was; for, after all, he was here so seldom. He would have changed it, of course, if his wife had come with him. Mister Kirtley said he almost hoped there wouldn't be any women with you, Colonel, because women seem to dislike the place so; but he said, if

there were, they were to do with it what they wanted, to make it more homelike. He wrote these very words: Let the women bring their own charm to the rooms; let them have their way with the house, for I suppose, from what Vic says, it is pretty awful. Vic, that is Miss Victoria, his English wife. But perhaps you know . . .

We were following her, Janet too, saying little. Zayda was preventing her exclamations by anticipating them.

— How drab? But cretonnes will make all the difference! How dark? But if you want you can live altogether in the east wing; there is room enough.

She was one flash ahead of Janet's exclamations, as against Dirk's recoils.

One question escaped my own flood of them, about the house.

— How long has it been closed, Zayda? (With her name coming so easily, with a kind of warm, kindred sense in my saying it!)

She looked at me, as if to see into my question: what gave rise to it, what feeling of being-closed.

She answered it outwardly at first: Ten years, since Old Hayes died, since Mister Kirtley inherited it, it has been closed wholly. But before that . . .

She flashed me another glance and seemed to see into my innermost wanting to know, as I had not yet myself seen into it.

Before that, she went on softly, just to me and my question: Before that it was closed even while Old Hayes lived here alone, after Mister Kirtley left—the last one to refuse it.

Then very swiftly, taking the inner breath of my following her, she added: You understand, this place is Old Hayes himself, it is not where he lived, it is his own living. And he

has not yet died to it, he is everywhere living and waiting for someone to return to it.

Then still more swiftly, looking to Father and back to me: Mister Kirtley said he was sending someone in his place. I am so glad if you all have come really to live here, not just to stay for a year.

And then, with a climax of wind blowing and taking one's breath: I'm glad for Old Hayes, but for you too—that you've come to all you will find waiting here for you!

As on the Road for me, now in Zayda! I as myself coming here. Not only with Father, or in the place of another, but I, too, to something in my own life, here in this man's house where no woman for many years . . .

One more flaring moment of this strange recognition. Yet more wonderfully, it was coming from another. *You will find simple and original in her what we had almost to die to glimmer.*

She knows, what I have come here to discover!

* * *

She left us upstairs to go for the rest of the curtains. In a succession of twelve bedrooms, six in each wing, with these last words:

— Cleony or one of her girls, if any are home, will bring up your luggage.

And she explained: Cleony is the only negro left; she and her seven girls, when they are home, which isn't often. I told you women didn't take to this place: her girls, now, are always going off to town to work, and they only come back when they are out of it. But Cleony stays, just for that week or so that Mister Kirtley comes.

Before she dashed away, I asked: But you, Zayda, you?

She read my thought: Oh, me, I'm born of it all. I belong, Mister Kirtley calls me just one more child of Old Hayes that he didn't have.

Then a faint flush spread over her face, the first color that had yet come to it. In a warmth of some personal feeling about what she had just said, she took flight for the rest of the curtains.

When she was gone Janet said of her: Heavens! She sounds like the Letter.

Janet was right again! I thought: Why, Zayda *is* the Letter!

MARCH

What Meaneth This Bleating?

We were a week here when the green began to mount: it was a stain on all the fields, fusing into the dun—without form or substance yet, more as a breath exhaled, given a kind of visibility like frost. It made patterns close upon the ground under the dead grasses, and all around the trees—airy breath-patterns, nothing more. Like frost, yes, tinted a pale green; only, unlike frost, it did not disappear to the warm suns which were outshining the cold winds that still blew, but rather increased, clarifying more and more into green.

There was more mud, the thaws going deeper; and more running water. The pools of it drained away now, and the streams ran with their water, and with that of the short but torrential rains that fell every day. All tensions were breaking, there was more flow than beat, more inner movement released. It was still covered over, except for those exhalations of green; yet one could feel the break forthcoming.

From the window of the room I had taken—next to the hill, at the end of the west wing—I was close upon all this sight and sound: within the atmosphere of green breathing from the forest. I felt that I could not get near enough to the impulse. Had I been dead until now, so to crave this life-

feeling? All the words of those four books were like a fabrication of thought that had fallen; and my mind lay bare of all inner structure to this fresh, direct feeling. I all but put my ear to earth and tree, just outside my window, for sound of the almost visible quiver. The trees, with the outspread sensitivity of their branches, seemed telegraphic of a time-message to their roots: It is spring up here in the sun! I felt such visible communication everywhere, from the revealed to the hidden: from that which lived in the sun to that which had not come to birth yet out of the dark earth. We who looked to the outward growth could read from branch and bud the message: It is spring! Were we not as the root below the ground, or the seed, receiving the living information? In ourselves, I thought, we could not know it; the whole growing world exists to bear the message to us. Bound as it is to the cosmos, to earth and sky element, it alone can bring the full information. It is spring outside—in sun, moon and star Time, it is spring! We who had lost the whole connection could not in ourselves know it.

In the house, we were not settled yet, Janet trying as many arrangements of the furniture as there are ways of playing a hand at cards, and involving us all in her changes. She even took the bed from my room to try it out with the chairs and chest in hers. But she returned it, saying: I don't know why, but I can't sleep in that bed; it makes me positively restless.

When I told Zayda this, she smiled with her secret knowing.

No wonder, she said, for that is Old Hayes' bed. He slept his life through, and died in it. A person could scarcely hope to sleep in perfect peace in Old Hayes' bed.

Then she told me that I had taken Old Hayes' room!

But that's all right, she said—again with some under-

standing of me that I had not of myself: I am sure if Mister Kirtley knew you he would think it was all right.

I begged her then to tell me about Old Hayes.

We were in the room—she had come to help put the bed back, frowning a little upon the change Janet had tried. Now to my urgency she smiled:

— But that would take the year! And anyway, hasn't Mister Kirtley written it?

— I don't know. You see, we have only the one letter about the place, and that is Father's, and he is hoarding it to himself. I haven't seen a tenth of it yet.

Now Zayda's smile deepened, extending its secret knowing to one of Father.

— I reckon your father knows how it is best to see a thing for oneself before hearing of it. But this would be a good place to begin learning about Old Hayes, this room. He took it because it was so close to the land; he loved the land, it was all he ever loved until . . .

But she interrupted herself: No, not that. It is the last thing to be known of him as it was the last thing he knew of himself.

— Now, Zayda, you're being as mysterious as your Mister Kirtley.

— No, no, I don't mean to be, it is just—things have to be told in a kind of growing way, to be rightly understood. Old Hayes could only be known in this way, from the seed up. First, how he came here . . .

— Tell me!

— Too much to do! With Miss Janet tearing time loose this way in the house, and with all outside for you to see yet, that is earth itself for this seed of Old Hayes.

But she promised: Soon as you see more of the place for yourself I will tell you.

She lost her chance, however, to her rival—to Cleony—the very next morning. To Cleony, who had no patience for letting us ‘see for ourselves’!

Cleony had first come down from her cabin to look us over, to see if she wanted to cook for us, to see if we ‘belonged.’ At first, appearances were against us, with all staying housebound, and with Janet ‘tearing time loose.’ But then something changed Cleony’s opinion—perhaps a visit from Father, or when she learned that he was Kentucky-born.

On this morning Father and I came down early for breakfast, each having decided separately to start this ‘seeing for oneself,’ in any weather. Father was being stealthy about it, that Janet might not hear.

I’ve moved my last chest, he whispered. I’m gone, for the day.

Then he asked me, though it was a little doubtfully, if I should like to go with him. And we went to get our own breakfast . . .

Cleony surprised us, being there in the kitchen, and having breakfast ready. Or I should say, we surprised her; for Cleony bore an eternal look of being where she was; we were only something in time arriving at her eternity, there in that kitchen. When we saw her we just retreated to the dining room and in silence awaited her service.

This was Cleony: large, with an after-shape of her seven children; moistly brown; with hair given up to its kink, standing cotton-thick and white to her broad face; with mouth mobile even in stillness toward much talking; still now, but only waiting to speak. With arms trying to span her enormous breast, she studied us, as we ate, from the fullness of what we did not know, that she could tell us. Through the course of stewed fruit she said nothing; but

then, as the next one of grits came, with curdles of thick sweet cream on it, she spoke the full content of her doubt of us up to this morning.

— I was wunren why y'all had come lessen yo' meant to go outside now an' agin.

Father was lost to her implication in a bliss of remembrance—of a boyhood breakfast of hominy meal ground fine as powdered sugar and curds of cream. But I caught it and answered it as well as I could.

— It has been so very muddy . . .

But then Cleony!

— Mu-ud? But dat de stuff dis ya place is made of, de pa't Ole Hayes like. He'd take a measure of it day afta day, time of yea' like dis, on his boots. He'd come in and say, Cleony, see, it's all right fo' 'tatoes or whateva. Ole Hayes, he all but ate mu-ud, dat how he tell it, he'd smell and taste even, or maybe only finga . . .

Then she said that word again: Mu-ud! And I could feel—within it was her story. Well did I know in myself every symptom of Story! There she stood, full of it, as Zayda was. But she was waiting to be asked, impatient, a little scornful, and considerably anxious—about Zayda. Had she told us yet? They were two story-tellers with the same story! Where Zayda was constrained by a kind of law of life in relation to it—that growth in time and place—Cleony was free for its utterance. Her only constraint was her opinion of her audience. Now that we were winning her approval in one way or another—Father by his relish of her breakfast, perhaps—she was about to break forth with it. No loyalty of mine to Zayda could stop her: she was full and too full of story. Cleony had been in service to a closed house far too long. Where life cannot be a deed of one's own doing, it becomes a story to be told: it cannot be both unlived and unspoken.

And now that I had myself spoken the magic word . . . Cleony drew one breath, deep and full, one breath for all of it!

— It was de mu-ud brought um hya in de fust place. Ole Ole Hayes, dat's Ole Hayes' Daddy. Up from Miss'ippi he come, up de Riva, lookin' fo' new Land; fo' de Land was in him too, dat's how it all sta'ted. Prospectin' he was fo' it, an' in Kaintucky. He liked de sound of dis wud, same as Ole Hayes afta him. Well, when his daddy came aroun' dat bend yonda, he like de look of dis country, mu-ud an' all. Otha folk feel diffren' though, dey scairt to step far onto it like y'all was dis past week. Wud aroun' hya was, all dis was jelly mu-ud. Ev'body say, ifn a man would go far inland he'd sink t'is neck. One man was lost thisaway, only his hat was left of him, movin' flat on de groun' same if 'twas wata. No one tried to git dat body; men'll go afta de daid in deep wata but not in jelly mu-ud. Aint no fear of wata like dat of land once it gits soft enough. Well, but Ole Ole Hayes, he from Miss'ippi: no one could tell him about marsh land, he know his jelly mu-ud. He up and left de boat an' walked him ova to whar he could see de valley, an' he picked up de mu-ud and look close; den he come back to de boat an' ask de cap'n ifn he knew if any was fo' sale. Jest happened, de cap'n own de Valley, bought it himself fo' a landin' and had most thrown in as jelly mu-ud. He was a Riva man himself, don' know nothin' of de Land. So he up and sold it quick an' for little to nothin', don' know fo' sho, but dey do say fo' a dolla' a acre, an' five hunnert of dem!

Now Cleony took a second off to laugh at her own story. She was lost in it, no longer needing any other audience than herself.

— He know his jelly mu-ud! Wasn't dat, maybe jest lil at de edges of de wata, but that wasn't what sunk dat man

noways, likely was jest one a de spring freshets dat go wild hyabouts. Fo' dis is watery land, it is fo' certain. Anyways, dat is how Ole Ole Hayes got de land he was lookin' fo'. Dat was in eighteen an' thirty-five, jest one hunnert yea's ago. Fust he built him de fust cabin yonda fo' himself until de big house should be done, an' all de othas fo' de slaves he had brung wid him. He had twenty head den; my mammy war one a dem. And den, den Ole Hayes got himself bawn, humble as yo please, in de cabin. He didn' wait fo' de big house, no, ma'am, Ole Hayes war in hurry to git himself bawn. He came ahead of time, and sudden, while his mammy was walkin' down her fust pain, right in dat cabin yonda; he got himself bawn close to de groun', as close as he could git, an' he came feet down, his mammy drapped him like fine white women don' do no more, feet down an' all but standin' up!

But now Cleony, with flesh so heavy to her heart, failed of breath and had to stop and sit down. In this moment she lost her audience—Father at least, from his impatience to get outdoors and see all this for himself. He got up with that firmness he had learned to use against the volubility of woman, and moved to the hall. Cleony, however, had one more thing she had to say: she leaped all else that lay in between, to bring her story to an end with:

— An' so Ole Hayes was bawn; an' when he died ten yea's ago, ten yea's this side bein' a hunnert himself, he done made five thousan' acres out a dat fust five hunnert!

Father very cleverly bound his impatience to her words, saying: This makes me all the more anxious to be out and see the place, Cleony. And I want to catch Zayda on her way down. Tell me, which way does Zayda live?

This was hard on Cleony: to turn us over to her rival; but Father's voice, like his tread, could be pretty firm. She

told us how to go to Zayda's down the main pike we had come, to the first side road, and up that . . . I wondered at this desire of his to 'catch Zayda,' but hurried after him, though Cleony, feeling my greater susceptibility to story, made one more effort to hold me, at least.

— Y'all know about Zayda, or her mother?

But even I was not tempted; for of Zayda I knew, with instinct, I must hear from no other than herself. So I laughed, where Father frowned a little, and said: Another time, Cleony. We'll be here a year, you know: you will have all this time to tell us.

* * *

Outside—really outside for the first time this week, really on the land for the first time since we had come—Father and I stood at the edge of the Forest, before starting out toward Zayda's. I had seen this descending hill from my window, and its forest; it had been as a picture framed, mighty and living, but yet a picture. Here it was different, where we stood; some combination of time and place and what we had since learned of it, made the difference. And perhaps, too, it was in our being together, Father and I, in a strength of some new likeness we were newly finding in each other. It was all deepened and intensified, so that the hill to the house was like a great charge of movement passing through us, that I received with a little trembling. And Father too; though the tremor was only in his voice when, after a long moment of contemplation, he spoke.

— I've been wanting all week . . . Julia, there *is* something in this place. . . . One can't just say hills and big trees and a house next to them. It may be a combination of these things, of land and forest, but in any case it doesn't seem accidental. The whole place seems to have grown together

with some sort of unity in which there is a life all its own. Now here, the man who built this house just here felt something of the way the hill rises on this side, and falls over there into that glen. . . . He must have had some profound inner feeling of it, and this must be left, as Hayes has felt it here . . .

Father had been murmuring toward the end, having only begun to say all this to me, ending in a murmur to himself. But I knew, without hearing it all: knew this difference that was the unity; knew the living conception of land and trees that the first Hayes had to have, to clear and build and let stand as it all stood. I was newly aware of the contour of the place from where we were: I saw how the house stood against the backbone of the hill, oblique to its rise; how, this side, the bone had been cleared for lawn and pasture, to the gentle curves—the bosom softness—of the land's own formation; how the other had been left forested, covered of rock and crag and all unevenness by the original wild growth. He who had handled the place had known how the earth was under its wilderness, his instinct of its being was at the same time one of its beauty. The unity of which Father had spoken was the earth's own; it had only been understood by the man who had lived here, not created. All the beauty around us was inherent: one felt it so; and the feeling was, for this reason, one of truth. It is a true place, I felt, with some wholly new existence of Truth in my mind; it is the first true place I have ever known. I meant—true with the first truth that had ever had its own existence for me.

For myself, I wanted to press on up the hill, following the mighty march of tulip and beech trees that bore the hill up, out of sight from where we stood. But Father held me back.

— No, today we must go on up the road and see Zayda.

It isn't time yet to see the Forest or the hilltop. Hayes says in his letter: *Leave the forests for April, until the buds are as torches of fire on the trees when you look up into them. And leave the graveyard on the top of the hill until May. It is so gentle a sight then, so detached and floating. . . .*

But—the graveyard? I questioned.

Come, Father said, I have just caught sight of it, from the front of the house.

And he led me around the left wing, out a little onto the cleared land, pointing me from there up the hill. This was my first sight of it—distant but yet breath-taking, with its lofty, almost heavenly, position: on the rounded summit of the hill; forward to the softly breasted and shouldered part of it; within a curve of stone wall; under a thick spread of cedars . . . And just behind it, a dark fall of Forest; but, pressed against the wall, as if to stay it from this fall, two great trees, seen even at this distance to be the mightiest of them all. I wanted to go up at once! I wanted closely to see it when Father said softly: They are all buried here, no matter where they die, they are brought back.

By hand, too, he detained me: No, Jay. Hayes definitely says: *Wait until May, learn of us living before you contemplate us dead.*

Then, keeping his arm through mine, he led me on around the house, down the lane to the highroad.

Why, I asked then, are you so bent upon going to Zayda's?

I'll tell you, he said. I want to catch her on her way to the house to ask her something. I don't want Janet to hear yet, or Dirk—they'd disapprove. Janet would say: But, heavens, what for? and Dirk: We haven't the money. If you'll promise you won't say either . . .

I promise, I laughed. We haven't the money, of course,

but I'm not saying this in any connection with what you're going to say.

— Then it is all right. As an absolute fact, our not having money is all right; it is only when it gets relative . . . Well, anyway, you remember what Hayes said he wanted me to do; stock the farm, bring life to it. You remember he said: Buy sheep!

— Oh, and again, ah!

Now mind your promise, Father warned. The fact is, I want sheep. I've had a place like this in mind all my life, all through the Service. With sheep. I don't know why. Dirk would laugh at me and say: For the peace of them. Maybe it is for this, after so much war. There has been an image of them always in my mind, as an opposite to what I've had always to do as a soldier. Not just as themselves, of course, but as a kind of symbol. As a matter of fact, I've had everything here in mind and in a way Hayes himself held it . . .

Visibly Father was drawn into that memory in the Letter. I longed to cry: Oh, tell me—share it with me, now that the others are not here—tell me! But I was silent, in the very intensity of my desire. Better in silence this communicated itself to him, and he looked at me with sudden closeness and said:

— Some time I must tell you more about that experience Hayes and I had together that night. Or let you read it from the letter.

Still I said nothing, and he went on, a little shyly: Some time when I get to know you a little better. You'll understand then, about the sheep. You see, that night we both sort of entered into the appearance of things and felt their—their inner nature. When you face death, and have a good long time to do it in . . .

All night? I prompted him a little.

Yes, he said, and was drawn into it for a second: Yes, the last firing was at ten. I had gone up with Hayes, with the other three guns, after the first one was placed and had registered fire. I got a wound going; but anyway I would have stayed, there was so much danger; and, besides, I felt sort of—of compelled to stay with Hayes, he had attracted me so strongly, with a certain quality. . . . And, too, I had had to order him into the worst of it, all odds against him. Yes, all night, there was a lull in the firing, we had until dawn . . .

But then we were interrupted—Father glad of it!—by Zayda, coming down the road, drifting toward us in that lovely way she walked.

Look! Father interrupted himself to cry with pleasure at the sight: Do look at Zayda. Jay, what do you make of her? Isn't she in some way remarkable?

So far, I said, I think she is a combination of a Madonna and a dancer. I have never seen such purity of face outside pictures of the Madonna, or such grace off the stage of professional dancing.

She's lovely, Father murmured. I think she is somehow connected with the family—not—not legitimately.

— Oh! So that is what Cleony was about to tell.

We really must stop Cleony, he said. We must learn it all from the letter.

— Give us a chance, then. You're pretty close with that.

— Yes, I know, but it is so intimate with a sort of—soul intimacy—of Hayes' inner feeling about this place and everything. I wouldn't want that misunderstood, and Janet and Dirk might—though, perhaps, you—later . . .

Thanks, I said, a little drily because of his doubt of me: that he could doubt in face of all my own 'inner feeling' of this place!

But now Zayda was upon us.

Good! she cried. I'm glad to see you out. I was afraid you'd never get free of that furniture.

Father said at once to her, with that intentness of his coming to meet her: Zayda, I want to ask you about sheep, about getting some sheep. Captain Hayes—that is, your Mister Kirtley—seemed to want me to stock up the farm, bring life back to it, you know . . .

Oh, yes, I know, Zayda said. He wrote that to me, too; he said to find you sheep and a horse. I've found the sheep, though not the horse yet, but I've told Prue Tyler about that. But as for the sheep . . .

She turned with a dancer's pirouette on her toes, and pointed us up the road, the way she had come.

— See the roof of that house, way back? Well, tomorrow there is to be a sale of livestock there; you can buy sheep if you want, ewes with their lambs. It will be your only chance to get a flock this time of year. You can go on up there now and look them over. There will be two flocks; you had better make your choice today.

Father said 'Thanks' fervently, and started on. But Zayda flashed forth a detaining word.

— Wait a moment. I must tell you about the place and the woman there. It will be a little odd for you to get sheep and bring them back to Hayes El. You'd better not say where you're from; just act like a stranger buying stock in to sell it again. You see, it is the Goddard place, and the widow—Ben Goddard died just a month ago—the widow is one of the women Old Hayes tried to marry . . .

She faltered a moment, over something not to be told in what she had to tell. Then, not unlike Cleony, she broke all at once with:

— You see, he tried to marry her to get a piece of land

that her father had. He never even looked at a woman until he was past forty, he was so busy getting more and more land, reaching out for it in all directions, like a man hungry would reach for food. When her father's place came next in line, he saw her, only then, although she—I think she really was waiting, and this was the trouble afterward, the chill and the hurt when she saw it was not for herself but the land. So she refused him; he got her father's place but not her; she moved on up the road and married Ben Goddard. It was like the advance of an enemy: she moved on up to hold ground against him. And, married to Ben Goddard, she did manage to hold out, by dint of giving her life and Ben's just to this one purpose; by dint of saving, and prospering in spite of Old Hayes, within the limits of the land Ben had, which is all they could ever get, Old Hayes having the rest. Just by living close, they managed, close as a turtle in his shell, and separate, off from every one. Left to himself Ben would have lived differently. But she held him to her one purpose. The way he died last month, that was the way they lived. It was in front of his tool house, he fell dead. He had been oiling and sharpening all his tools; it was as if he fell dead in exhaustion, just taking care of things. So now she is selling out; she can't do it all herself, and anyway there isn't any use with Old Hayes gone, and only Brent and his wife left . . .

But here she caught herself, for she was head on in another story.

Anyway, she said breathlessly, you can see how it might be, though for myself I think she wouldn't care, even if a Hayes were to get the whole place in the end. I caught a glimpse of her at the funeral that made me think— Well, there was a sort of relief about her, as if it were all over

inside, the strain of her whole life. But you'd better not take any chances, this may just be my imagination!

She dismissed us then: Get along on up the road, else I'll stand here all the morning. Just don't let me get under way on the Widow Goddard!

And she laughed at herself, and hurried on her way down the road. Father watched her go, for all his renewed eagerness to see about the sheep. She was so lovely in movement; she had some conscious relationship to space, like a dancer; the air seemed plastic to hands carving it, and feet shaping their steps . . .

There *is* something remarkable about her, Father sighed, but it eludes me. She is perhaps the whole year's discovery.

But then he turned back up the road.

To the sheep! he cried. And he fell into such a stride that I had to run every few steps I took, to keep up with him.

* * *

Now we could see the house, narrowed distantly to the point where the long parallel lines of trees leading to it, seemed to meet. The road was only so many tracks made in grass and mud—the fresh tracks of the funeral, likely. The house bore a look of self-isolation that only death had broken into. This aspect increased as we went closer, entering into its atmosphere of self-sufficiency, of a rigorous and forbidding care.

It was large, and had been built to—was it not to rival the growth of El House? It was plain-faced, with no porches, but with a front array of many windows, more than El House had. In every feature it brought El House to mind, as if the comparison had been in the Widow's mind. Trees had been planted, in the way they grew of themselves at Hayes El;

and they had been pruned upward to look mightier than they were. There were even more outbuildings; but they did not have that look of growth in time about them, like the Hayes cabins and sheds, but rather a studied order that copied the true growth of use and purpose but did not quite achieve it. I could imagine the Widow through years, building and shaping, with eyes always on Hayes El down the road. A deliberation of thought was upon everything; a gesture of imitation; and a white heat of attention. I could see the Widow, kneeling on the close-clipped grass, before the precision of flower beds and shrubs, looking over her shoulder every now and again toward El House, in all the years it had stood empty, and thinking: His place is overgrown and weedy, while mine . . . And I could see her hovering at the windows, drawing blinds and curtains with the thought: He has no one to draw his, to keep his carpets from fading! Outside, moving from one shed to another, I could follow with her eyes a man—through years—taking tools from them, and putting them back to her words: Now, Ben, be sure to put that back in place, we must take care and save . . . I could feel a weariness of small cares upon the man, moving from one shed to another, until . . . last month . . .

Last month!—the time is living here. I see it. See Ben Goddard inside the shed at work, getting tools ready for spring, plow blades and harrow wheels, to be the first to use them, come the first day in March that the land can be worked. I'll be the first, he thinks; although the one he has in mind has been dead for years. Just from habit, and her unceasing anxiety: I'll be the first! He works until it is too dark to see any longer; then he straightens up with difficulty from the bend of his labor, and stands looking upon the order of tool and nail. He has his usual thought that rises from order: Now if anything should happen . . . (It is her

thought, through years, as she cleans drawers and cupboards in the house, folds linens properly, keeps fresh sheets on the spare-room bed: Now if anything should happen!) So he prepares to leave the shed for the night. He goes out sighing—is it not for some need to call him back urgently tomorrow? He locks the door, puts the key in his pocket, looks up to the sharp winter sun, goes blind with light . . . Never mind, it will pass, it is just from being in there in the dark . . . But it does not pass. Blindness comes, but this, too, is bright, is red, is heat, is fire . . . and there . . . is nothing . . . else . . .

And she: when she goes to pick him up? The bed is ready, and his clothes; the blinds already drawn to the dusk of death, come at last to life that was never life . . .

But, however prepared from without, how from within? He is dead, dear God, he is dead, and it is through living with me. It is my life that has killed him!

— Julia!

Father recalled me as he had that first day on the lane: as if he knew I had gone out of myself, and had need to be recalled to it. But now, in knowing me a little better, he went farther.

Julia, he observed me closely, you look so absent. Have you then inherited this from me? What are you thinking about, to look so?

But he knew, and he spoke of it himself:

— There is so much here to be felt. We can't go up there now and knock at those closed doors. Let us try to see the sheep without being seen. See, that high land there looks like sheep land. Let us turn off here. We can get through the fence and go on up, out of sight of the house.

The land to which he pointed lay above the house, and it looked like moorland, in the bareness of the month, and the

heather-violet of distance. It was sheep land, Father said, from the look of it; for sheep thrive to the rock and the thorn, to land high and stony like this, with narrow glens between for their leaping. There would be a miracle of grass later, issue of life even from the rocks; but as yet there was no stain of it on the land, only the glimmer of green that was in all the air, giving image of itself for later fulfillment. Father led me to one side, picking a way on uneven turf that bore the stone color of turnips. Except for these that served as stones, I should have mired shortly. Father, in boots, and with the initiation of war in his feet for mud, went ahead with a firm step while I wallowed. Now and again he turned back, to pull me from one root to another, and to talk more about his own feeling of the house.

It would be too neat, he said, saving as death had been here. Death has a dignity that life has not. See, Jay, how death has brought a life of small acts together and made a whole of them.

I saw, in the house of the Goddards, how the seal of death bound all that was small and scattered in life about it: bound its labor, the large and the small digging, from plow to trowel; and the buildings, bringing all together—from barn to the smallest coop in the yard—as a flock within a fold, drawing a line of belonging about them. How it bound, even, the great stones in the fields to the little shells that marked the widow's flower beds. Yes, I could see—such unity achieved here by death, that life had not given it: only here in death, what at Hayes El was accomplished in life.

But Father was far ahead of me now, and had discovered the sheep! He called his own excitement to me, and I pulled myself from this sight of the house, only to see one more inward . . . of the sheep . . .

There, slowly across the hand's curve of the next hill,

they were—coming toward us. At first, one at a time, forming white but without line against the blue of the sky, their single volume increasing in mass as each lingered for the next one's coming, until—the whole flock, countless, all one soft white mass to the blue, shining at its edges as clouds shine to the sun! Now behind them, softly as they had come, and singly, clouds of their bodily resemblance gathered and massed until, in a perfect mirage of likeness, there seemed to be two flocks. Outwardly there was only the coincidence of cloud and earthly image. Yet for me this spread suddenly, to include all things in some new, inherent, twofold relationship: of hill to the sky over it; our density of body also to the sun; earth-substance under our feet to the air; rock dissolving to the liquid life of the plant; all solid to air, all dead brown to living green. And there in the house, death to life, his death to her life, if only she could see, and feel, what I . . .

But what was it? In another moment it was no more than a dream in the mind from which one awakens, before its end and explanation. And I was standing there, stupid, as one is after a swift dream; and staring into empty space. For the sheep were gone, they had moved on down the hill, below the horizon. I might have lost the impression entirely if I had not seen something of it reflected in Father where he stood, looking after them; and heard it afterward, when we got back home, and Zayda met us and asked: Did you see the two flocks, and did you decide which?—heard it in Father's answer: Oh, yes, I saw the two flocks, but there was no difference between them.

* * *

The day of the Sale came, bright to the drawn blinds of the Goddard house, warm to the chill of their meaning. Janet and Dirk both went with us, innocent of our purpose;

but Janet sat in the car the whole time when she saw the ruts of the road melting in the sun, and Dirk prowled the outskirts of the crowd, never losing himself in it with Father and me. We were even lost to each other—I to Father—in the nearer reality of Farmer. I was as close to the man next to me as his clothes: his very sweat was upon me, and the odor of his labor. His excitement was in me—for hogs and hay-beds, cows, harness and milk-pails, the traces of one old wagon, and the wheels of another. An hour through, I hung upon the sale of nothing I wanted. And Father, too: he was flushed to his forehead, long before the sheep were put up, just with his neighbor's excitement in bidding upon something that, more likely than not, he feared he might get.

But now, as the crowd gathered in the barn lot, our time of such fear had come! Father and I found ourselves close-pressed together, closer in the flesh than we had ever been. I felt child of him as never before—in shape and skin, and in all inwardness. This was centered wholly upon the sheep: his desire for them seemed to include it for all else. Thus simplified, I could share it.

I was almost afraid to see them close at hand, out of their pageant across the horizon, and of its parable. We stood now in the mire and dung of another aspect of their reality: that of their mutton and their wool, and the young lambs' slaughter. And of their price per head. Yet even so, as we looked, we kept a measure of our first wonder of them. They were at once so timid and trusting; so apprehensive and patient; so soiled and so white. Beast, and parable of man! Under the warm sun the sheep, separated into two flocks, stood close to one another and the fence, against the noise of their selling, and the mass intentness of the crowd upon them. Might they not be seeing this in a way of their own—as I

now, as if in them, seemed to be seeing it? A cloud, fiery with a strange alien storm, not of the earth of which they were creature: one taking the image of its intention—for slaughter, for the lamb-sacrifice? The ewes who had lately lambed, some still with the broken life cord of the blood hanging from them, trembled at the first sound of the bidding and ran to the gate, toward the broad safety of the pasture. Those with older lambs stood with more resignation, as if they knew themselves in any case nearer the weaning, the vital separation. But all breathed rapidly; and from their breath made audible by its unison, came a new hesitancy to Father and me, before purchase of so much life and death. For these now were the terms of it, not their mutton and their wool.

This close to animals for the first time, to animals in numbers, in the group nature of their being, I felt close to the mystery of their sacrifice. Close, in an immeasurable silence of time spanning the whole evolution of life. A few of the sheep, bleating, gave the sound in their muted cry of the mystery—of that which was inarticulate in them that, in man, had come to speech. . . .

But now the bidding had begun, the clamor of the moment was covering the longer silence: clamor of man speaking, shouting, bargaining for blood. Father went utterly still to it, as—the first flock was sold! What was the matter? Panic of auction? Or conscience at last that he had no money to pay for the sheep? Or the unspeakable mystery? The second flock was put up. I looked at him, mute myself, unable to speak for him. Now the flush mounted still higher, up into his hair: flush conspicuous even under the weathered brown. One word came, dry-throated, hardly audible, that no one but an auctioneer would have heard. Ten. It was—what he had thought to pay at the most for the sheep.

And here he was starting the bid at it! Panic of auction: Father was lost to it.

The auctioneer appraised his bidder: boots and bearing, the flush, the dream in the eye, the tremble in the voice. By way of the boots, or just gratuitously (with that peculiar Kentucky gratuity of title) he called Father Colonel. Ah, Colonel, thank you, Colonel, I see you know sheep where these farmers do not. Then he was off: Ten has been offered, ten as a starter, ten, ten, ten, who'll make it a half and a half and a half, five more lambs to this fold, and they're larger, I'm bid ten, who'll make it a half and a half and a half—

Now hands laid hold on our hearts and our throats, pressing them toward utterance. Father raised his own bid. I have twelve and a half, who'll make it thirteen . . . The bid seemed to rise of itself. I have fourteen and a half and a half and a half, who'll make it fifteen and fifteen and fifteen . . . Thank you, Colonel. I have fifteen now, who'll make it a half and a half . . . The auctioneer drilled that word 'half' into the air until it split to the sound of it. The purchase price of all life resolved into that of the sheep with her lamb, their eternal valuation standing between the whole and the next half. Father no longer knew what the figure was, only that it wavered between the whole and the next half. He was fevered to purchase, he was all but delirious. The auctioneer, for climax, drove the sheep toward us, so close that we heard and saw and smelled their panting: They are as good as yours, Colonel, one more half, just a half. Father had only to lift an eyelid . . .

The auctioneer broke the drill suddenly to the cry: *Sold*, to the Colonel, for sixteen and a half.

The crowd broke to the sound, not moving away but seeming to dissipate, leaving Father and me pressed together

still, as if it were around us. Someone had opened the pasture gate. The sheep, released, took to the pasture with one concerted bleating. At levels—as many as there were sheep and lambs—the sound rose and descended, within a pitch limited to one chord for the whole flock that was no more than one note of human intonation in a lost chromatic. Again the mystery of the animal and its cry, of life unreleased as the sound was: life caught and held as in a static cycle—no scale or rhythm or range as in the human octave. Life here in sound, *as* sound: here to be found in the difference between animal and human utterance; here too the mystery in expression.

But even to reach toward it was to lose it. As if we were giving up the same effort, Father and I turned from the sheep and each other to go separately after the crowd—though we had no more to buy; we had no money even to pay for what we had bought!

* * *

Dazed still by his purchase, Father was waiting his turn in the packed kitchen of the house, facing for the first time the numerical value of the sheep. Dirk had joined us, all irony: Do you realize, my dear Father, that you have bought not one or two sheep at sixteen and a half per head, but twenty-odd, and that it all amounts to well over three hundred dollars? Father had not realized; he had made no computations whatever. He never made them. Father had lived all his life as cloistered as a monk from the business of living. Now there was only his pension for the four of us, until Dirk and I could get back on our own, after having spent all we had on his accident. And Janet had just bought a Persian lamb coat for over half of it! Still Father kept his innocence of money: he looked this at Dirk—still, though

his turn was coming next to pay for the sheep! Father had a way—maybe it was a soldier's way—when he could not think *through* something, he stopped thinking altogether and simply trusted. This situation for him was akin, perhaps, to many others in his life in which the command to it was quite inexplicable, but his obedience unquestioning. Buy sheep! Well, I have bought sheep. One who had been ready so many times to pay with his life would hardly quaver before a mere payment of money. Yet I quavered for him as, now, his turn came. And even Father himself cast about a little for a way out, turning to Dirk and asking if he might lend him ten on a down payment. Then Dirk! ahemming for the first time, almost embarrassed, tempered to confession: Sorry, but I—I just spent all I had—on—on a heifer.

What soft eyes Father lifted to Dirk then, and how softly he said: Well, then, some way it will work out! As if he were feeling a new force of benignity working when Dirk began to yield to the eyes of a calf!

Faith, if carried far enough . . . This was the most I could hope for Father as his turn came next. But how any faith against figures? Three hundred and thirty, the man figured with a stub of a pencil. Then he handed this to Father: Sign here, Colonel. The terms are six months—without interest. . . . Oh, no down payment for purchases over ten dollars. Just sign for it all. And by that time, you see, you'll have the lambs and the wool sold.

Father, turning back to Dirk, took but mild advantage of his moment: You see, Dirk, you see? Then he eased away, expanding into the crowd of his neighboring herdsmen, entering a new fellowship.

A greater moment for him came when Dirk appeared with his heifer, trying to lead it, to take it home in the car. It was a Jersey, bland with a silvery loveliness: with great moon eyes that drowsed openly, unawakened to the scene though actively resisting it, rearing and planting itself squarely after each step jerked or pushed or lifted—deceptive eyes, I thought, with the moon's own deceit in them: an illusion of softness, a veiled intention. Why was it that animal eyes did not change expression while all the rest of the body reacted? Not even a dog could look what its tail wagged; or a horse what his ears flicked; or this calf, what haunch and hoof held rigid. Why only in man the reflecting eye? Was there some connection between eyes, and words to the voice given? between the responsive look and the word's expression?

We took the calf home in the car, in spite of Janet's shrieks, and the handkerchief, violet-scented, held to her nose the whole way. There was no need for it until the end, when a blob fell. Rather a rich life-odor came from the creature, a foresmell of milk: I breathed it in deeply as the mother-scent of all life, man's own, original in this beast and its single function.

What a miracle this was, that Dirk had bought with his last ten dollars! I was all deference to the little heifer as I helped pull against her resistance, to get her out of the car. Here was another embodied mystery: not one of mind, of thought, or any dim foreseeing; but one embodied, with form, color, scent, immediate in time before us—not of the future but here, and active in a function self-wise and governed with wisdom. Whence? Where the source of it, since it was not in the beast itself, not in the eyes reflected? Where outside, that was at the same time inward? And close, so close that it must be as a part which I, if intent

enough, might see? As on the hill with the sheep, but with nothing now to give the intimation, no cloudlikeness, I felt close unto seeing an interplay of life from outside all things, into them . . .

So wonderful she was, the little heifer: color of milk and of moonlight: dream-enwrapped, in an organic dream. She stood there as if rooted from the earth, creature of it, the land's first-born to us. Not only with Father now did I share such wonder; but with Dirk, too. He looked it—and pride, too, that she had come before our sheep.

* * *

We went the next morning for the sheep, to drive them home. It dawned to the deed, brightly, all crystallized as for some new seeing. The clouds were condensed to form and clarity; the horizon had a struck look, light flashing where earth and sky met in line of hill or house or tree. Again—that interplay of being, heaven to earth, earth to heaven. The air was sharp and stirring, and had the excitement and warmth of the blood itself in the way it blew. Dirk walked as wind-blown free of his flesh as Father and I felt, giving his coat to the wind, sight of his stump to anyone's seeing.

We rounded them with difficulty, not knowing the parlance, the cry of 'Sheep-ee-ee.' Dirk argued, Father coaxed, and I kept scattering them with my overanxiety to bring them together. At last they collected of themselves at the point of the open gate which will always bring sheep together (Zayda told us afterward); and they filed through while we counted—was it not with the first calculation made by man? Then on the turnpike, the sheep driven. I went before for the gates, to close them. Dirk walked the grassy gullies of the road to keep them from spreading. And Father

drove, now and again bearing some of the smallest lambs. The sun gilded their backs as it does flaked snow where it has loosely fallen; clouds floated above, softly shadowing them; and all the world went silent to the sound of their coming: of padded hoof to hard road, and of the inner rush of their flock movement, and of the muted choir of their bleating.

Running ahead of Father on the lane, and looking back, I saw in the flesh that first imagination of him. But he was not only himself now: the image was as one of all men at some time in their life when, their wars and their wanderings over, they come home to the earth and the care of its creatures. It included the tall man and the short. . . . To the taller outline about Father I spoke within myself: Here are your sheep. We have brought them home for you.

* * *

We put them into the field where the horse was to go later; and Father and I watched them the afternoon through. It was warm now, and the turf on the hillside was almost drained dry; and we sat on the ground though Janet from the house called up the hill that we should catch our very death. . . . The sheep, coming to the fresh pasture, fell with audible satisfaction upon it; and then, for their reflective digestion, they folded their legs under them with the lightness and grace of a bird drawing wings to itself; and so they lay, profiled to our view, with the look of a camel about their heads, these lifted in watchful resting. Some of the lambs lay to their ewes sidewise also to our sight, their bodies lined with the beauty that is in rest wherever it lays gentle hold of a form, easing it to its own inner likeness. Others played to the slope of the hill, joy seizing them and flinging them through the air, in a self-expression of its na-

ture. In their play the line of joy was perfectly described: it was a curve, this was the line of all pleasure. It was as vibrant as lightning, as visibly drawn upon the bright air.

We were caught by the curve and drawn into it. Father lay back against the hill, arms under head, body given to the earth no less than sheep were. I felt him young with all life in the moment: as boy to the hill behind him, dream of all happiness in his mind, dream of all youth. I was the older; yet I too was within the curve, held to the lamb's pleasure.

We saw one of the ewes leave the fold and descend the hill toward a creek that was flowing swiftly with water. We saw her lie down in the stream, get up and lie down again; but it was only from within the curve—as if she were taking pleasure in the water. When a few lambs went impish across our sight, they easily stole the scene from her; and we followed them instead. For myself, when they bounded back to earth, I went on, in movement as if never to stop—as the very wind, blowing. Father lay back closer to the hill and closed his eyes, a bliss of ease now on all his features, and in his body that was drawn up in comfort away from the rigor of his carriage that his form bore even when resting. This was still described about him, square of epaulet and belt and boot. But he was withdrawn from it into himself; the hill revealed the inward identity as the lane had: here he was shepherd resting with his flock.

Borne on the wind, I came to the sight first. Of the ewe there in the water, no longer getting up and down but staying . . . down. The sight itself called from me: She is caught, she is held there! Father, drilled to instant action, reached her first, though I leaped to my cry and ran in the straight line of alarm toward her. He was pulling her out, alive still.

. . . She lay there, with more than simple exhaustion: rather, with resignation. Father had the same impression of her. There wasn't water or mud enough really to hold her, he observed. She didn't make any effort, she isn't making any now. His thought gave him knowledge what to do. He jerked her up, making her stand, and began to rub life back into her. Then we noticed, hanging from her . . .

She's lambled in the water! he cried. Jay, go and find the lamb while I work on her.

Oh, strange task! I kneeling to the stream, my hands in its movement, seeking the body of a lamb born to death. From what instinct in the mother? Indifference? Stupidity? Or wisdom of life that is beyond birth and death, is born equally out of both? With the water shallow—more flow than depth—I soon found it; but dead, in the life-sac. Then again I felt before me, written—a living scripture! And the script was: dead lamb on the green grass, sun warm with life, water flowing with it. . . . Life, outside all forms taken: a flow through all things, never wholly bound—death but one form discarded for use of another. Lamb dead; but all, around it, more intense with life. . . . I too!—as if with that of the lamb given it. If only I could be intent enough, I might for myself see the One living Reference! For here again it was written, as it had been the first day on the lane, and afterward on the hilltop with the sheep: in things that lived and died with their own wisdom, one that man himself had lost somehow, and had to regain in turning back to where it was original, still, in himself and outside him. And it was One Wisdom, I felt, in all things, as it was One Life: it was One Living Word! All things spoke, or tried to speak it, in one measure or another of its endless description. It was in the bleat of the sheep trying to say it; in the all-

piercing rays of the sun, shown; in the movement of the flowing water, glimmered in action. If only I were intent enough!

But I seemed only to be at the stage of the wonder, not yet come to the knowledge born of it. And shortly to exhaust the intensity of this wonder. Yet I arose, stamped through with the impression. And all my thought began to form a new question, of him who had sent us here: Was it to read *this*, that you send us? Did *you* find it here? Is *this* the return you have asked of Father—one to *such* intimation?

And the year from this moment, and all things in it—*all!*—seemed to hold the conceivable answer.

* * *

After dinner, when I had gone to my room, Father came to it and he said: Julia, we should be writing Captain Hayes, about coming and all, and about the sheep. I'd like to write about them, how it was, you know, the first time we saw them, and how their bleating sounded, and about the lamb in the water. I wonder if you wouldn't—for me. You have such a gift with words that I haven't . . .

But I've lost that, I cried with some of the anguish of my loss. Father, that is just what I've lost, as definitely as Dirk has lost his arm.

But Father gave no heed to my protest, he just stood on in the doorway continuous in his thinking: I wish you would do it. All you have to do is to tell it, just as it happened: how the sheep looked, how they sounded. You don't need to make up anything about them . . .

— Yes, but Captain Hayes—would he want to know this? And what sort of words are there to tell of it?

Father just said: That is what I'm counting on you to

find—the sort he himself uses in speaking of Hayes El.

Then he wafted me a sweet fatherly smile of confidence and left me—drawn now to my desk, to paper and pen for the first time in a year, as if to words waiting there for me: ‘Dear Captain Hayes, Father has asked me to write in his place, about how we have come to Hayes El, about Zayda, and the sheep . . .’

About the sheep: it wrote itself out of sight and sound. It was like something spoken, however—not written. At first it was to the image of the tall and the younger man, across a span of water; but after a few pages it drew to itself another audience: a short man, and old—the one close by, here in this room, sitting in a chair with the legs cut off. Then my pen almost wrote into the letter the salutation: ‘Dear Old Hayes,’ as his became the nearer presence: ‘Today we went for the Widow’s sheep and brought them home to Hayes El. So has life returned to your closed house. Not we but the sheep have brought it—and they, even through death, of a lamb born dead . . .’

But at the very end the short and the old man faded into the tall and the younger, in listening to a promise that I found myself making, not for Father now, but for myself: ‘So does our year at Hayes El begin, our living here for you. I will write more as it happens—in this way, if this is what you wish to hear of it: if this is the nature of that “return” you asked of us.’

But the word ‘us’ had slipped in. I erased it to write instead ‘Father.’ And, a little frightened of my pen—how far it had carried me—I repeated: ‘I am writing all this for Father, of course, as he has asked me to write it for him.’

APRIL

Pit of Baptism

It had become April with subtle difference. No longer any strife in the air; all—earth, stone and branch—yielding. It was April—with the last frost in the ground melting and running everywhere in little streams, different from those of March, more shallow and playful, and more short-lived, for the warm winds and sun soon dried them into soft fissures of soil seen as shining ribbons between the now visible grasses. The tight strained buds of March were loosening even unto leaf or a bloom in the more sheltered places, although the woods were unbroken as a whole, only here and there a little flash of that bud-fire that is only April's. The skies were dissolving out of their stone into a powder of its color, blue; and the clouds upon them were breaking up from their great huddled flocks and separating fleecily, much indeed as the sheep now were spreading apart upon the broad warm pasture.

New urgencies came from earth and air, the month stirring to its own activity. One could feel pressures even in the night, of life getting ready for a self-happening. Sooner in bud than in blade; all but immediate in the trees. In the young orchard halfway up the cleared slope the aura was of rose rather than green; in the old one across the road

from the house the bloom of white had already broken through at the ends of the branches and weighted them softly, like fine siftings of snow.

Zayda, seeing the young orchard, said it was time for the first spray, we must send for Clive Aylor. And who is he? I asked. And she said: He is a Hayes on his mother's side—that is how he is connected; but what he is in himself . . . She pondered: I don't quite know yet; we are all wondering. The Hayes men seem to be divided into two kinds, those who dream and those who do. Clive is one who dreams.

And your Mister Kirtley? I wondered aloud.

Zayda's clear forehead shadowed a little into thought.

I don't know, she said. I reckon it would be who dreams. Though it is not in the way that Clive does, or any of the others except, perhaps, Drake. But he dreams *and* does.

To this name Drake her whole being changed, flashed brighter, focused itself as upon a distant point, stayed absent for a long while and only returned to me with effort.

She faltered again in her fluency as she said: Has Mister Kirtley mentioned—Drake—to you?

— It may be in the Letter, in a part I haven't seen yet.

She grew a little grim: Then it can wait. Now as to Clive, orchards are his specialty. A few years ago it was something else. It is always something special; Clive can't get a grip on the whole of farming, just on parts. On these he puts all his imagination and labor; more imagination than labor, though you couldn't call him lazy, just—dreamy.

But you will like him, she said swiftly. I do, ever so. I'm afraid it is his very dream that I like. It is what makes him a Hayes, for it is in all of them, no matter how practical. After all, it is a dream of the earth. It was in Old Hayes to begin with. Back of all he did—in his hands—there was a dream.

For herself, she went trailing into one, speaking of the others! And I wondered visibly about her—how connected with this family. She read my wonder from me and answered it, laughing.

— Oh, me, I'm as bad as any of them—would be worse if I hadn't been born to labor. As it is . . .

She fell upon my room, where we were talking, to straighten it.

After you see Clive, she said, I'll tell you about him. It is a story! Don't let Cleony, until after you see him. Trouble with Cleony, she doesn't give a person a chance to see for himself. She's all pent up with things to say, same as myself. I can feel for her! But I'd like to ask you, don't let her tell before you see—especially about me.

She smashed into my pillows with the words, half smothering them in the gesture; and she whisked the covers off the bed and to the window, to shake them out and air them. Far out she leaned with a sheet, letting it float in wind and sun, with her white arms holding it. I could feel that she did not want me even to think of what she had said of herself until I had come first, somehow, to see it.

The next morning when she came to work she was not alone. I was outdoors, on the front step, watching for her, for it was such a sight to see her walking. And Dirk was with me—perhaps also to watch? I read his amazement of her from all the ways he sought to conceal it. She would elude, in her peculiar quality, all definition of what he knew of himself or any other. And especially of a woman. Dirk seemed doomed to Father's own disillusionment in love and woman: twice in love he had been disappointed. The first time was in himself, that his own feeling could not last the term of his engagement. The second love had crashed in his

accident. The girl who was with him, urging him to the speed that had caused it, had escaped without hurt; but love between them had crashed with the car. She had no use for him one-armed; nor he for her. Their feeling for each other was not on the level of any sacrifice of this depth, made or accepted.

On this morning, when Zayda came drifting into sight Dirk spoke of the elusive in her.

What do you make of Zayda by now? he asked. You who must make something fictional if not true out of everyone.

I told him what I had told Father: A combination of a Madonna and a dancer.

Madonna? He questioned the word utterly.

— Yes. I don't know why, but there is a kind of motherhood hovering over her, detached, contemplative, but still there.

In this moment we saw—that she was not coming alone! But with her, fluttering free from her blowing skirts, like a bird, there was—a child!

So! Dirk said with an instant harshness: Motherhood. And I was just beginning to think that she might be the one true virgin left.

But I said Madonna, I reminded him. And that implies virginity.

My good sister, he mocked, you can't conceivably be saying, even in a figure of speech, anything about an immaculate conception.

— Only this, my good brother, as I have told you before: that probably all the words we have fallen heir to in the story of mankind go farther in their meaning than we dream. Like conception—of anything, child, book or building. Suppose this were not limited to the flesh, or the single mind:

that this were but one step in a great outreaching cosmic process that didn't end until it reached the fixed stars, and maybe not there.

— Oh, draw a line somewhere!

— All right, the fixed stars. Somewhere in all that extensity, the process might be immaculate. Certainly it can be in art or mathematics or philosophy. Why might it not be also now and again, however rarely, in the birth of a child? or maybe, in some sense, in the birth of all children?

— I refuse to answer your inconceivable question.

— I wasn't asking *you* for an answer. Just look now, at Zayda coming.

She had turned into the lane. Now she was walking with the child hidden behind her, both on the one edge of the road that was firm for walking. She came with the same grace and ease but somehow more straightly, as if with some new determination. I could foresee that it was the child: that it was he she was bringing me to see before she told me . . .

Well! Dirk said drily. You've probably hit it again. Motherhood.

As she came up to us she reached behind her, and with a playful but firm little jerk pulled forward—the child. She gave us time first to see him, before she spoke.

Such a strange little boy he was! A figure in fantasy, dressed in bright patches of clothes, the long legs of his overalls giving him a height not all his own, though he was very tall for his age; and with this given also by an overlarge head and wind-rifted hair standing ends up on it. About his head there was a gnomish look of maturity, although the face itself was very childlike: was delicate, shy, dreamy, perhaps backward . . . Yes, in looking more closely I felt that his own little being was dwarfed inside an overgrowth

of body and of mind; it was all but extinguished. It shone from his eyes, but remotely: not dull, but dimmed, as if with absence. He had a forehead like Zayda's, high and clear and somehow in itself knowing; and below it his face quivered with sensitivity, active in expressions of an immediate intelligence. But the eyes did not reflect all this, they seemed oddly unawakened. He had that blurred bright look of a child who is sleepy: that sort of elusive loveliness about him, that half-enchantment . . . His eyes now looked at us, unchanged by our strangeness, though all around them the thin delicate face was active in lines of shy fright.

Zayda seemed to know when we had caught this essential impression of him; for directly I myself had it she spoke.

This is my little boy, this is Boy, she said. I brought him to help around, he is in so many ways handy. I thought maybe Mister Dirk, if he wanted to start any work, on the fences or whatever . . .

Dirk could not forbear interrupting with his quick hurt: You think I should be working when I am not?

But Zayda was equal to him. Calmly she caught up what he said and what he meant, and answered it openly.

— Yes, I do. Else you will never learn to use the left one. Time to begin is right away, with that as with all else. And the fences do need fixing, here and there all over, and it is pleasant work, and will keep you out in the sun and air, and will give you a chance to see the spring as it happens.

Dirk was still hurt, but less so than if I had talked to him in this way. She was so calm and detached—as I had not yet learned to be with him. But he gave her such an answer as he might have given me.

— Now see here, you aren't trying to save my soul or anything like that, are you?

Zayda just smiled as she played with Boy with her hands,

lightly swinging him forward again with each retreat he made behind her skirts.

— I hadn't gotten that far in my intention, but likely as not I would come to it in time. Never was a woman who didn't try to save something in someone; she can't keep her hands off, it is in them!

She laughed, releasing Boy suddenly so that he fell to the ground, gleeful of falling; and she held up her hands.

— It's in a woman's hands, anywhere they fall. Same as they straighten things in a house, they handle everything. But don't worry. If I do get to it, the process will be only of light and air and water, same as it is for this house.

She turned to the child then, as to the more immediate purpose in her mind.

— Boy, you go now with Mister Dirk and let me use my skirts for my own walking. Go show him where the front fences need fixing, and get him a hammer and nails.

Now Dirk, out with all of it: How do you expect me to use them with one hand?

But she, meeting the full question: Boy will be the other one—that is why I brought him. I've already told him.

— Oh, I see! You have already prepared him with pity for my infirmity.

She looked steadily at him with wide opened eyes.

— But surely, Mister Dirk—with pity, yes. What else would you expect one to feel for a loss like yours? Would you have others look, and not feel, and not know?

Dirk flushed and did not reply, but looked away. I could feel tears almost rising, tender from his hurt and this sudden unexpected sharing of it, this true pity that drew lines of pain felt on her face, and urged all her being from her in a soft yearning toward him, of a desire to ease that hurt. I saw a new beauty of giving in her, and a new art of being:

beauty, in this unreserved fullness of feeling for another; and art, in this way she had of quickening pain to receive forces of healing that flowed from her. In Dirk now, rather than in myself, I felt this of her, knowing in him the hurt she had touched upon, but the healing she offered.

The moment was almost unbearable with all it contained, of beauty. She brought it to an end, as if knowing this quality of it, with her quick humor and sense of the practical.

— Well, go along now, both of you. I've got my own work to do.

And off she went, leaving Boy with a look of a bird who has fallen from a nest into a strange world that is empty entirely in being empty of mother, and altogether uncovered of—a wing covering. He might have taken flight after her if Dirk had not caught at him, roughly, with:

— Well, come along, since we must. Show me the fences at least.

He held away from Dirk but followed after him, skipping to the longer step, very much indeed like a bird trying space out for himself for the first time; but also, like a bird, gaining in confidence quickly, and in a new sense of companionship until—closing in to Dirk's side, and taking the hand offered—this came into his stride, smartly: I'm doing this without Mother!

In the house, I met Zayda coming into the hall from the kitchen. She was shy before me, and her eyes fell to what she said:

— Miss Julia, I brought Boy over to tell you about him. Maybe if I finish my work early enough this evening, I will have time to tell you.

Then she said her familiar words: 'It's a story!' But wryly, because it was one of herself.

When we started out together it was evening, the true evening—not the afternoon that the word meant usually in this countryside. Cleony had come down with one of her sudden miseries in her heavy body, and Zayda had stayed on to cook our dinner. It was after dinner . . .

To walk beside Zayda was to take her own experience of walking from her: a new one, in feet and hands, as if they were plastic to the air. And it was to have confirmed and intensified that sense of time and space merging, with the one taking on the tangible reality of the other. It was to know Evening, as never before, with a kind of clairvoyance taken from it. Not this in the morning with the stir of creature abroad in the land, and the rise of the sun, and the pull of it on the blood to the head; nor at the height of noon, with morning close in memory and afternoon in apprehension; nor in the afternoon with the weight of the day heavy behind one. But only in the evening, when the day somehow balances itself, and all Time with it; when, in looking to past or future, one can see equally, more in a proportion that must be of Truth; and in a kind of resolved clarity that comes to all things until one has a sense of seeing the invisible just through the clarified visible. Such is the natural clairvoyance of the Evening.

With Zayda—through her, it seemed—I knew the evening in this way, in its own nature. And so, other things: the highroad we took eastward, toward her home. I felt a new swing of it through the valley, in its suspense between the surge of the hills that lowered and lifted it. Motion came into it, as if I were riding, not walking, it. Zayda spoke only once on this part of our way, as if reading my sense of the road from me.

Old Hayes called it Saddle Road, she said. He made it himself, riding a horse over it. Living things like a road

bear the feel of the way they were made always, they never lose it.

How well I could understand from the lane to the house—from all that hoofs had beaten into it!

She turned left at the crossroad to her own home, and to my question she smiled:

— Oh, we're not going to my house. There is another place to go first for what I have to tell you. Besides, Mother still cannot feel about things as I do—about the Hayes, I mean, and Hayes El house. I could not take you there until she would be willing. But some day, perhaps . . .

She turned from thought of her mother to one of herself, her eyes looking inward to this as she went on:

— There are things that people understand differently, and you never know how until they see for themselves. Now what I am going to show and tell you about myself, Miss Julia—I could not possibly tell ahead of time what you will feel true about it. Nor could you tell your own self until you saw and heard. It doesn't matter to me any more, one way or another, to be understood or not. But it does to—Mother. You see, it hasn't happened to her, as to me.

— But what, Zayda?

Baptism, she said.

I recoiled from her word, for it bore just two references for me—formality and hysteria. Infant in arms, getting red in the face from squealing; do you renounce the devil and all his works and ways?—vague concept of perdition, few drops of water flecked with a foregone sense of futility in water and word. Or, the opposite of this: scene on a river bank, black folk in white robes almost changing color to the robe, clasped hands shaking. Name of . . . get ready, hold your breath? Baptism?

Zayda smiled at my visible thought but repeated firmly:

Yes, baptism. But don't make up your mind how you're going to feel about this until you see the pit.

— Pit? Good heavens, Zayda!

She smiled more broadly: Yes, I know. Most people would call it a fount but I call it pit. For it is a pit—it is what you go down into, in yourself, when the baptism takes. Anyway, this one is built right in the earth; the whole place is, church and all. But you'll see!

She hurried, with her eagerness to show me, up the last rise we were climbing. With words short of breath from her hurry she said as we went:

— I told you there were only a few pieces of land in this whole part of the county that Old Hayes didn't own. Miss Eldora's is one, and the Dekkers', and down on the river bank, the Tylers'. Then there is the church property. Old Hayes tried to get that too, but it managed to stay independent of him. I reckon—there were just a few things in life that could hold out against Old Hayes: God, and love, and death.

She reached the top of the hill before me. She stood against the sky, head flung back again, face upturned: gesture of poise, for flight. Who is this girl? I wondered afresh. What, as baptism, can have happened to her, to release into gesture and form something almost spiritually visible?

Come and see, she cried, you can see it all from here.

I hastened to the sight. There, lying low on the floor of the next valley: a square of a white church building, in the midst of an original forest, hard by one hill in the shadow of another. A graveyard standing all but vertical to the church, on a hill rising sharply behind it. Built into this hill a mausoleum—where, Zayda said, all the dead are laid for three days, bad weather or good, for burying. And then . . .

The pit! she cried. See, even lower than the church, at the very bottom of the world!

I could hardly see, for the new growth of leaf and grass around it: I caught only gleams of water in a shape to be imagined as round.

Zayda impulsively caught at my hand: Oh, come on, there is so much to see! And she pulled me to a run down the hill.

Now in front of the church, on a narrow drive leading between trees—I saw how different it was from other churches: how it was not a built thing, but had grown where it stood, out of the very earth-nature of the place. It took no spiritual flight with spires, nor was it lofty with any self-consciousness of its purpose. It bore no history of its past in any effigy, nor any prophecy in a Cross. It was built like a dwelling house but for a difference of taller windows; but these were of clear glass, bearing witness only of wind, sun and rain: they were not storied windows of the past, but only of a living present. Yet all this earthiness—this intimacy with hill and tree and running water—gave it a spirituality that even a cathedral might envy. This was fresh and immediate, a veritable breathing forth in the moment, an emanation as palpable as the wind that was blowing, or the life budding in the trees, or the deep-colored quiet of the evening that was valed here toward depths of the absolute . . .

Zayda was watching me closely for my experience; she seemed to read it from me, and take decision for her story.

It is such a true place, she contemplated softly: So simple and true. Founded at least upon a real impulse, no matter what has grown out of this since. You see, the River is just over the hill; it was built by the pioneers who came up the River, it is one of the first churches built in the State. I can so well imagine how it was, after all the hazards of the

River; for that was a wilderness no less than the land—all roads were wilderness roads into Kentucky. To have found themselves here in safety, with all this valley spreading to their view from that hilltop there: they must have felt suddenly their likeness to the Children of Israel, of being led toward Canaan. They must have felt Jordan crossed, and Canaan waiting. . . . And just where the thought came powerful of its first feeling, they built their temple.

She looked up, eyes glowing with this imagination.

It is a true place! she cried again softly: I have known its truth. No matter what has happened here since then, how its worship has changed in time, gone shallow and false, no matter! Something true was here in the beginning, some vision of God and the Earth, and it waited—and I just happened to come to it, led by someone who knew this sort of living truth that lives—and waits, living, to be recognized.

But abruptly, giving up word for sight, as always:

— But let us go down and see it!

And she ran, before me, leading me directly around the church to—the pit. Pit, indeed!—it lay as an open mouth for the earth's breathing. Seven steps deep, it lay, in a hole walled with rock, moss-seamed, slime-filmed, and filled with water roiled with mud from its spring's fresh flowing. Its form was a circle broken by the seven steps descending. On its surface, a drift of dead leaves floated thickly; but one could feel a quickening of larva-life under them. The water exhaled freshness and decay in one breathing. Here again before me, that strange juxtaposition of life and death, striking with their closeness, the picture of a cycle that, enclosed within its form, projected the whole mystery.

Zayda stood staring into the pool as into a crystal: she was like a seeress standing here, invoking some magic of picture consciousness—not prophecy, however, but remem-

brance. I shall never know what actually she told me, or what she committed as imagination. Or what came from the place itself—the evening, the valed silence, drift of dead leaves on living water, fresh sod upon graves rising to the hill behind us, green image of the resurrection of the earth in Time, caught and held eternal at spring. From whatever sources, this the story told or seen—in scenes that enacted themselves here before me—in time a year ago . . .

* * *

Zayda walked along to the wind, skirts flattened together, whipping from her body like clothes from a line held taut against it. Zayda went, rigid with will, with a determination newly come to her from someone else—from a man who was himself a rod of it, bent one way, toward God.

Sunday morning, and five miles to go, walking in the winds of April that were blowing in now from their other side, from summer. It was early for the thing she was going to, for baptism; the air was warm enough, but the water would be cold. She could anticipate it now on her skin, just from the way the earth breathed upon her. It was not the usual baptism time, it was much too early for that; it was a special one for her. The preacher had said: 'It is early, but the reason why baptisms are not felt as a rule, is because they are made too convenient and comfortable. The outer ceremony doesn't correspond to the inner happening, nor does it bring it about. No, Zayda, we must not wait, we must do it at once, while you feel as you do.'

But how was this? Walking along today, Zayda could not clear in her mind just how it was the preacher had made her feel, in talking to her about Boy. It was not remorse; for he did not preach remorse. He was not the ordinary kind of preacher, and it was rumored that he would not be staying

long at the church. People could not understand the words he used: Not repent, but remember, realize, reflect . . . Perhaps he was hurrying up her baptism because he knew he would not be here long. Once he had said: 'Zayda, if I bring about just one real baptism in my life, it will be enough.' He seemed to think that hers might be this one! She could not understand how this could be; but to the light in his eyes as he said this, and the tone in his voice, she had taken up his challenge and said: 'All right, bring on your Water and your Word. Let them do what they will for the thing you've made thoughtful in me.'

This is how she was now: thoughtful. Of Boy, and the past leading up to him. Even before the preacher had come, Boy had brought her to a new way of thinking. Before she had lived all in sensation, with immediateness, in a kind of seasonal way, as the Earth's own daughter. These were the preacher's words for her; he used them—smiling. But he was stern enough when he said: 'You are living too far out of yourself, you are going too free. Now that Boy has come you must bind the deeds of your life together.' But Boy was already making this need felt: to recall—how his birth had come about; to remember, review, reflect: all those words the preacher used, beginning with the prefix *re*: they were the need she was herself feeling, now that Boy had come. But baptism? What was this to do? The preacher only said: 'Baptism, real baptism, is remembrance; and remembrance, real remembrance, is the beginning of the Way to which you were yourself born, with a rare gift for living it.'

These would have been only words to her, except for a life they had in the preacher himself; and for something that Boy was requiring of her, in the queer way he was: the still unborn, absent way that seemed to ask of her: Who am I? how did I come to be? She could find no answer in any ordi-

nary memory: or in anything left in herself of love, or passion, or desire. The thread of his coming into existence seemed to lie either outside herself entirely, or deeply within, in a region she had not yet consciously penetrated.

Zayda held herself away from trying to understand what the preacher might mean, ahead of time. He had said of this baptism: 'Don't try to understand, just give yourself to the Water and the Word.' This should not be hard for her, such giving was that 'rare gift' of which he spoke. It was at the same time her fault, all her past temptation. It would be easy enough to give herself to the water in any case, and to all the other feelings of an earth-nature in the scene before her. She was daughter of this, indeed, and sister to all other earth-children living in the mother element. She had played all her life beside the pit, stirring the water with her hand, just for the cold feel of it, or to make frogs jump or lizards vanish. The water could not be too cold; and as for the frogs and snakes, she hoped the pit would not be too clean of them, she would like to have their company in this holy moment!

Before God, she thought, she would need all the fellow-feeling of the earth that she had ever known. The preacher had approved such feeling in her; he had won her to God with promise of a larger brotherhood. 'The heavens are peopled like the earth,' he had said. 'All things are alive in God.' (He spoke always in this way, of life abundant.) Still, she would be strange to the heavenly hosts; and she thought now to go with something held fast in her hand, if it were only a stone. She searched for one in the gravel on the path leading to the church, and found it—small, round, brown and sun-warmed to a feel of livingness. With this in her hand then, she strode up the last hill, comforted . . .

At the church—the people were all outside yet, with the day so fair. As she came up the road past them, she felt herself singled to their waiting as a bride might feel: she felt bridal—warm, shy and suddenly virginal. Knowledge and guilt of knowledge was theirs, not hers; it was in their eyes as all turned as one man to watch her come. She was herself pure of it: only in feeling so could she have gone on, passing them.

Inside, the preacher was at prayer at the altar: she hung to the rear, waiting until he should see her. Her waiting reached him after a while, going up the aisle in place of herself, leaving her vacant even of its own sensation. When he became aware of her he left the altar to bring her the white robe she was to wear.

Here is your robe, he said, you can put it on in the vestry room.

She asked then: Where are the sandals?

He looked suddenly strange, enlightened, almost holy as he answered: When the time comes I shall give them to you.

Then he turned back to the altar. Her heart took a full turn in her breast, from something she felt he meant to do, about the sandals.

In the vestry room, over her wind-blown hair and her hot face, she drew the white robe. It was made of coarse, unbleached muslin, shapeless, and the seams drawn from crude sewing. She was disfigured of her shape by it—of its full round beauty, all its own grace and ease. At first she resented the repentance of her kind of sin that some woman in the church had sewn into the garment. But she remembered how the preacher had said: 'There are no marriages in the spirit, no men or women, none of that kind of striving.' So she supposed it would not matter how the garment made her look—the shape of her soul under it would be her

own: this could not be hidden or altered, one way or another.

Hearing the organ, she put her hand to the door to open it. But it trembled on the knob, still because of the robe. It was the garment of her deed as her own clothes were not: it was like something she was putting on herself, to get rid of in the baptism. She recalled how the preacher had said: 'Only what is remembered can be forgotten, only the truth can make you free.' The robe stood for such remembering: only in wearing it could it be cast from her . . . This thought alone urged her through the door.

At once glances came battering, actual to feel, cold and hard as hail. Still she might have turned back and fled if the preacher had not moved toward her, speaking as he came, words for her protection: There was a certain creditor which had two debtors, the one owed five hundred, the other fifty . . . As he joined her at the front pew he finished the parable: Her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven the same loveth little. Then, bidding her sit down, and kneeling himself before her, he drew the sandals from the folds of his robe, and himself put them upon her feet! Now glances battering again! And not only directed at herself, but at the preacher. But he arose, as Another must have arisen from such humble service; and again he withstood them for her. And as the music of the procession began, he led her to the door, so calm himself as to keep her calm, and so benign as to make her feel blessed in being—the greater debtor.

On the way to the pit—she walked the way with him, free of the heavy embodiment of the robe in his own freeing thought of it. The wind and the bright sun helped, too, claiming again in her what was so kindred to them. Before the pit, however—standing still, with the wind hushed for

the moment and the sun more steadily shining upon her, with some single intensity—she took shape under the robe, unclothed of it: a naked shape, not of body but of soul, to words the preacher was saying now, full of the mystery: One body . . . one baptism . . . I by water, but Another by fire. She began to tremble in this new shape to the intimation.

The pool was like a fallen sun lying before her: round, and with its water back-glancing all the light poured into it. The four steps leading to it were in shadow; the three under the water, obliterated by light. She was herself blinded by this, but he led her . . . into the water, onto the fifth step, with the words: In the Name of the Father!

Then it began! The water's re-creation of her, as if in another substance, more akin to its own and that of the sunlight and air. Her body formed of this as far as the water rose: up over her limbs, shaping them to movements as of water flowing. She had felt kinship to earthly elements before, but not in this way: this was a spiritualization of all her former feeling, it was of some Essence—One—in all things, springing from the one Fatherhood of Creation that the preacher was naming.

But now the next step! In the Name of the Son! And water almost up to her waist, creating, as it went, the new image. New realms of feeling, expanding beyond all previous ones; of love, infinitely extended of its radiance from the heart's life, until it spanned the whole universe as a rainbow, holding all contained in universal embrace. And this love was different from others felt: it was one in which she found, rather than lost herself. But before the new proportions of this Self found could so much as dawn upon the horizon of her vision . . .

The last step! In the Name of the Holy Spirit! Oh, if

the water covers me all over I shall be wholly re-created; and if my mind takes on this livingness of limb and heart, however shall I bear the revelation? I baptize you then . . . With the words, he put his hand to her back for the immersion. Her ears went water-deafened to them. O strange element of water with a name for it! Cold as death over her heart, with all the life shocked out of this into her mind, so that her thoughts were all living things, and so her memories. Now here under the water—all the deeds of her life, which she had not merely forgotten, but which she had never shaped into thought: all, unreeling backwardly, as pictures in a dream . . .

It was one of many years, happening as a day, with one deed enacted in it, deed of Boy's birth. But all happened backwardly. Autumn came first, in this year-day, and night. Two figures moved along a moon-paved road, shadows only, of herself and a man. They were animated, but it was only with life outside them. They moved not to their own will, but to the moon's urge to fruition in autumn warmth, with night to cover the procreative deed. The man vanished in the night, as if he were only of its substance—of warmth and darkness. She emerged out of it, however, into the noon of the day going backward . . .

She was still a shadow in the next picture, but one made by a bright sun of high summer, with more depth and definition. Again she was not alone, but with another, in a great open field into which life was surging toward its fullest expression in the wide opening leaves of tobacco. Life was at its leaf-stage, before flower or fruit: fresh and upsurging still: with urgency from within. But it was life undifferentiated, not of her will or that of the man with her. She saw how it was now: with the whole stream of life, pouring into her, out of all things. Under the mighty current, the one who

was with her vanished; but again she emerged, now out of the bright obliteration of the sun. And again she reappeared . . . in the morning of this year-day, and in the spring . . .

But now she was alone. She lay alone in the new green world of grasses, asleep, but moving in a dream, restless with life. Now she could see the dream that, before, had escaped her. With more reality than the scenes of her own life, it passed before her. It was not of any time past, but of one to come. She could not follow it all, for it went far far into the future. But one figure moved through it, leading and guiding and giving it all impulse. And this was—Boy! As if this were the moment in which she had conceived his life, alone. As if, from this dream-conception, he had gone on ahead of her, drawing her after him toward . . . this very moment in the pool! . . . through all boundaries of time in her mind, to trace for her an inner connection, of life continuous . . . Now she had come to it!—the meaning of Boy, who he was for her if not for himself. Words formed out of the picture, into a thought, as she came up out of the water. This thought, that dawned as some pure recognition: Boy is . . . he is . . . my eternal remembrance!

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It was with these words that Zayda ended the part that she told me. She spoke them, hardly more than to herself, as if they were but the thought coming again to her. And then she turned and walked from the pit, as she must have walked after her baptism. With vision in her eyes, distant in time past that was time to come. Only when she reached the highroad did she stop, to wait for me, and to say all at once:

— I don't suppose you can understand what I mean by this kind of remembrance, unless you have known someone

in your life who has meant it to you: someone who binds all the deeds of your life together, and even all the feeling. But maybe some day this will happen to you; you look like a person ready for it to happen to. Or maybe you'll write your way into it. There are many ways it can happen. All one needs is a shock that goes deep enough. Baptism is just one, or maybe all are a kind of baptism. Love is one, and death, and war . . . I think it already has happened to your father, through war. And in the end it came to Old Hayes, through love. You see . . .

She caught her breath, then came out fully with:

— You see, Old Hayes loved my mother in this way, and Drake was born of this love—illegitimately, folks call it around here, but if ever there was a true birth of son to father, it was Drake's to Old Hayes. What I've told you about Boy and me is nothing to what happened to Old Hayes, through Drake. But that is another story, that is all of them in one! You'd have to see Drake first, and he is hard to see, harder than Mother. But maybe some day . . .

We had come to her side road. She stopped abruptly to ask:

— Will you be afraid to go on alone? You look a little frightened.

I was frightened, but not of the road before me, but of her words: something, or someone, shock, love, death or war . . .

I said of my feeling: You are right about Father, Zayda, something like this has happened to him, and it is connected with your Mister Kirtley.

She looked closely at me, not surprised, but newly intense.

Then there is something that belongs to this place, that has brought you! she said almost to herself.

She looked so closely that I found myself pulling away, from what she seemed to be seeing. She said good night then,

quickly, and turned into her road. In another moment, however, she came rushing back, crying in one full warm breath as she came:

— Oh, but Miss Julia, don't be afraid if ever . . . And don't try to understand beforehand, don't even think any more of what I have said, just bury it somewhere in yourself and let it come up when it will. Please—in connection with everything that happens here, don't anticipate, and don't try to understand, just let it happen!

Another flash of movement and she was gone. While I went . . . down the highroad . . . feeling touched and healed over in the same moment, by what she had said.

(2)

I wakened next morning as if I had had a measure of Zayda's baptism in my sleep. All fresh and clear, as if to a yesterday fully realized and so, forgotten. It was a morning for such awaking! Never so April—washed air and sky, with the drippings on each thing separately: trillions of facets, on one great world-diamond of light, emerging from night and sleep. The hill to my window was a breathing freshness upon me in bed. I thought of how Janet would be shutting her windows because of her neuralgia. If only she would take the pain with the freshness, she too might feel this new day, with the whole year enclosed in it, as in bud and dew-drop. The morning was one world-wide pool of baptism for me. But I had slept through the remembering part of it; I awakened only to the forgetting. There was no time past, all was to come. And all, all, was contained in this morning in April!

On this morning I heard the thrush for the first time, singing through, without break or uncertainty or trial, the full mounting liquid of his song. This was the voice of morn-

ing, of April: voice of the new blue-white sky, the glistening air, the dripping bud and grasses: voice of sun-sparkling dew.

I was late to the early hour of breakfast with Father, but in time for the second half of it that he had with Janet. Fruit and cereal with me at seven; coffee and the rest of it with Janet, at nine. Coffee and conversation! They were having them when I came down, or rather, Janet was having them. Father sat back with lips tightly pressed against both eating and talking. I heard my name and Zayda's as I came in. And: She is little better than a laundress, not to mention . . .

Father spoke briefly then, but it was between closed lips: — See that you don't mention it then, Janet.

But Janet was verbally under way, she could not stop even at the sight of me. She only made that fluent change to which a person caught talking must resort: of saying, 'Well, she might as well hear it, I'm ready to tell her outright . . .' It all ended with the words: Little better than a prostitute.

But this word bore no offense to me, because it bore no reference whatever to Zayda. It was empty and meaningless, just one of Janet's words. No shadow came from it on the bright morning, the all-bright and new morning.

I saw Janet apart from her speaking: how very pretty she was in the lavender chiffon of her dressing gown, through all the excess of its folds and flounces; how young and tender to life; and how bewildered—by all the things she could not feel for herself, *all* of Hayes El. Just for this one amiable moment I felt more kindly to Janet than Father. He sat compressed into silence, and his military bearing again, so that his uniform seemed to come back to his shoulders. Perhaps he had had a night of it also, he looked tired. He made a certain picture as he sat there—as if he were filling this

position at the breakfast table also, in another's place. The scene was familiar to the room, as if Old Hayes and one of his wives had enacted it, and Captain Hayes . . . the only time *she* came . . . These women and their aversion to Hayes El! When Father cut at last into what Janet was repeating, and called to Cleony for more and hotter coffee, I heard three men calling as one: Cleony, coffee!

Cleony appeared in a way that confirmed my sense of this scene as familiar: at once, as if awaiting the call; and with a grin of secretive knowing.

Yassuh, she said, I was waitin' to bring y'all some.

And she looked a certain way at Janet—not entirely with scorn, even with a certain understanding: wasn't she voluble herself, and wasn't there something in all women, black or white, left over from every night, to complain about? Especially at Hayes El! The dampness, if nothing else. Oh, yes, it was all familiar enough to Cleony!

When Clive Aylor appeared on the lane with the spraying machine, Father fairly shot from the room; for, after all, constraint is constraint. And I followed, drawn always to that road, by an expectation that remained of its extended sort of seeing.

He was walking, and driving from one side the long cart that bore his power machinery. From this, as from his own carriage and clothing, came the look of the expert, the professional man. His work suit was of a farmer—denim, old and faded, with new patches; but it fitted him trimly, drawn into a leather belt at his waist and tucked into boots below. He wore the small-brimmed sun helmet of tropical countries which emphasized further his trim outline, his distinctive leanness. Now as he came closer we saw this—saw how extremely narrow his face was under the crownless hat. It was the thinnest face I had ever seen, with more than a physical

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want of breadth to it. It mirrored an inner constraint, one focus of being, a single intensity.

After a slight expansion from this intensity in a smile toward me, he began to talk to Father, about the spraying. At first he was only professional, but then:

— You see, I have the best equipment. I have put everything I have left into it: not just money, but my very life, and my wife's—especially my wife's. You see . . .

His intensity had carried him into this confidence of itself. He recoiled from it as from a spring released, into a confused, vague murmuring: Bad luck . . . everything at stake on this harvest of apples . . .

He and Father walked away then to the fence, to look across at the old orchard, and then up to the new. I stood on by the cart, feeling as if I had been struck by the snap of that spring, until they came back. Now his face was enlightened and given a little breadth by hope. He was saying with free eagerness:

— Oh, it is a year in twenty for fruit! I have not been mistaken this time. If only now we don't have a frost! It is the same with my own trees, they will bear unto breaking. If you don't mind, I'll take my pay in apples. Maybe money would be safer; if frost— But somehow I want the apples: I can't get enough of them, I am a man so hungry for a harvest.

He was carrying his hat now, having removed it the better to see the trees. His face was made almost holy with his hope. Less than ever he looked the farmer—there was something so mental about his countenance. Drop some spectacles upon his nose and he would turn into a professor.

No, he was saying, I won't need help. You see, I have a hose that will spray fifteen feet high, the whole tree from the ground, though I have a tower, too, if I should need it.

He pointed to a ladder arrangement folded alongside the great tank. And he repeated those words that seemed to haunt him for justification: 'The very latest equipment.'

He and Father went then to the old orchard across the road. I watched from the fence, the deadly veil shrouding each tree for a moment, fogging its rosebud radiance, arresting its palpitant life movements. It was like some virulent inoculation in the blood of a babe, turning the sweet flush of its new life into the pallor of death. I felt in the spray a desperate protection of life by death, as the anti-toxin was. Later, when they came back, Clive voiced my very feeling in what he said of sprays:

— It is my dream some day to work out another kind of protection for fruit trees, not deadly; I am sure this one is wrong, but I know of no other. It has come to me, like a great idea, including many of our treatments of plants and man: we should combat death with more life, not with death. You see, this is Drake Parker's idea, it is his vision, but I share it, in my own way. But the trouble always with me is, I have more ideas than I can bring into actual existence.

Before he left he stood for a moment with so much intensity that I felt a physical shock of it through me as he said:

— I wonder if you would mind if I brought my wife over this evening to—to meet you and to see the orchard. She is like me, she can't get enough of the trees; they seem to give her their life, and she needs this, she needs . . .

Shock again, as of this need, directly. He trembled to it himself and murmured: Thank you; and then he drove off, the cart rattling iron to the road in a flat toneless sound that covered the living throb of his voice echoing through me: She needs!

I ran to tell Zayda: He is bringing his wife over this

evening. Oh, Zayda, what is this terrible need of hers, tell me!

But Zayda shook her head: No, see her first, see Cordelia. Only then could you understand!

* * *

Time of day for April is the morning. Evening is not quite in its harmony as a month. For retrospect, yes, for looking backward as into Zayda's story; or for any contemplation eternal in Time. But not quite for living in the moment, actually in April, in buds of fruit trees unfolding. Evening comes too still to the bud's breaking. Evening anticipates end in the beginning: soon it will be over; the year will go as the day, petals fall, fruit ripen or rot . . . Evening brings August to April.

As I saw Clive Aylor coming up the lane with his wife I thought: She should have seen the orchard in the morning.

(With new excitement I saw him again, for Father had since said: There is a resemblance to Kirtley Hayes—that thin centered look, that intensity—only Hayes' face is stronger and more mobile.)

Actually they were walking side by side as they came; but in effect she seemed to be far behind him, in her fatigue not able to keep up with him. I felt tiredness in her creeping after his intensity.

He was dressed now in a dark street suit, and indeed wore glasses. She was in silk, perhaps in deference to our being city people. It was too serviceably navy, and cut in no style whatever in order always to stay in style. The neck wanted in line most, being neither round nor square; and she had tried to fit a pointed white collar to it. The collar bore her gesture of fatigue: she had worked and worked

with it, as a woman will with a collar, and when it would not pin in smoothly she had given it up at last, thinking: Oh, well, it is white anyway, and will give a touch of spring to the old dress.

The white *was* effective—with this intention.

Eagerly he came up to us saying: This is my wife, this is Cordelia!—as if there were something in her for us to see—wonderful, beyond this appalling tiredness.

But what?—what could there be in her beyond it? Now as she gave me her hand I had a horrible shock: it was not living, it was but the skeleton of a hand! There was no moisture of skin, no warmth of blood. Not often does one feel the structure of the body in this way: usually it is somehow pervasively ensouled, with one or another quality of the person living within the structure. Seldom in a handclasp, only the thin bones of five fingers; or in a voice, only the breath, not the product of it—voice in the word spoken. To feel in this way structure and process! The bones of a hand, and the labor of voice—not warmth and the word! It was not because she lacked soul: there, in her eyes, was more than I had ever seen in anyone before. But it was all there and nowhere else: it was as if soul had all but lost its embodiment, and could only mutely look from its last stronghold—the eyes.

She made an effort to speak, to say: I am so glad . . . it is good, so good, to add your orchard to ours this spring. But I could see in the eyes this gladness in orchard, in spring. Her eyes begged also: Don't look at me, how wan and meager I am, just feel how glad, glad in the spring and the fruit. Her face was her soul laid bare: I had no right to look again; I had seen too much in the one glance. So, after the handclasp, we turned away from each other, looking only to the orchard as we walked there side by side, talking

only of the season and the bloom. But as we walked I did watch her hands, seeing what I had felt—the bones, with their swollen knuckles. They hung stiff and dead at her side, hidden so far as she could hide them under the scant folds of her dress, until we reached the center of the orchard. Then suddenly they came to life! Suddenly she lifted them, and then—gesture never to be forgotten: etched forever on the air of this place—or wherever entreaty went up afterward in my presence, in word or movement or silence—the gesture of these hands.

She stood under one of the trees, facing its trunk and its first outward spread of branches, as one might stand to a cross at an altar. She stood as one kneeling, she was so small, and her knees so bent to the weight of standing. And slowly, both with the pain of her longing and with the bodily effort, she lifted her hands, palms up, cupped with the crooked fingers, higher and higher, pain and effort increasing, until they were above her head. Wordless, praying just with her hands, just hands praying. I had seen hands before, clasped, crossed, outstretched, outreaching; hands telling beads, making signs of the cross, hands in all their yearnings; hands of mothers, of lovers, and once of a man drowning, hands alone out of the water. But never hands like these—arthritic, skeletal, cupped upward to a tree as if to receive from it the fruit of very life!

Sometimes in the great cathedrals with their many altars, one comes suddenly upon a woman praying, truly praying; not just paying for a candle and lighting it, nor murmuring to beads, nor just kneeling, but bent in two, cast upon the ground and weeping. I have come suddenly upon women in this way, and there is no intrusion more violate of privacy; there is no intimacy closer than this, of soul to its communicant living beyond its last image. As I had fled cathedrals

before, that held women with anguish praying, so now the orchard . . . And Father walked quickly behind me, and even Clive, leaving her alone there, for as long as her prayer might last. I think even Clive had not known until now how great was her need, how suppliant her prayer. He had been measuring it, perhaps, by his own; and by outward things that might be bought with the yield in money of a harvest. He had not known that it had taken possession of her very soul; or that soul could itself take possession of any embodiment like this, of her hands. She was as strange to him as to us in the moment: as remote, at this outermost boundary of her nameless Self, with her hands reaching across it. He joined us, as if to be near someone in face of an infinite distance of being, glimpsed through this gesture of hands that were tearing their way to the vision. We walked closely in one retreat from the orchard, back to the house, to await her there.

When she came she made no excuse or explanation; still far from us, within herself, she seemed to see us with indistinctness. I looked at her face now safely, for she was beyond caring; and I saw no boundaries, just a shining cross of features given their illumination by the eyes. Now I could see what Clive had been so eager to show, almost without knowing himself what it was. He turned to me in the moment and made a little gesture toward her as if to say: There it is. See what always I have seen in her, but without knowing how beautiful! Such startled pride came into his face, his bearing. He was himself so overcome by it that he turned to go, to take her away, to cherish this alone. She hung back, to look once more at the orchard. Then she spoke of it, fully.

It is good, she said, to have seen it, and to have someone

share one's own hope of the harvest. It will take so much hope to hold off a frost. It will be good to feel you here, hoping, as I shall be, over there . . .

She looked across the fields toward her home that stood in a square shape of tree only, not of house. But then, slowly, out of her face it all went, all the light that was her hope. Now even the eyes were empty.

We must be going, she gasped. She will be wondering where we are.

And hurriedly they went, she leaning on him with the full tired weight of her body.

My wonder was Father's: Who? and what?—that she should be so tired.

Zayda knows, I said. Let us make her tell us.

Zayda was still in the kitchen, washing out the towels that Cleony invariably forgot: Zayda, with hands dripping! Even Father now was giving up his fret about her doing our housework. Water and air were so vividly her elements. To see her wring out something white, or shake it from an open window, was to see her in them. She made such pictures at all her work: we came upon them everywhere. Zayda—making a bed, hands smoothing a sheet with a caress in them; Zayda on her knees, straightening a drawer for one of us, as a mother might straighten the scramble of a child, with a laughing indulgence; Zayda, weaving in and out of our places at the table, so lightly and swiftly that all seemed served at once instead of in succession; particularly, Zayda—pouring water, reckless with the joy that she took in its streaming brightness. By now Father was even letting her clean his boots for him! She made such a joyous picture doing it, sitting in the whirl of her skirts on the floor, in the sun, blowing wisps of hair out of her face as she worked.

(To his first discovery of her, and to his protests, she had said: But I like doing it, Colonel, I do it always for Mister Kirtley when he comes. He is a horseman like you, he lives in boots. Better give up scolding me as he has, long since, and let me do what I like.)

Father and I on this night beset her in her kitchen with: Tell us now, tell us about Clive and Cordelia!

She looked up the hill for the sun, to see the length of evening left for her story. It was setting to the hill, but that meant it was high yet in the valley. The hour was right for Story. Zayda, born to this, could not resist it. But she hesitated, perhaps because Janet and Dirk came in, and Father included them as her audience.

Janet came looking for Father, effusive about the tender evening, wanting to go for a walk somewhere in it.

A little grim, Father said: All right, Janet, to the young orchard, to listen to Zayda's story of Clive and Cordelia.

Dirk asked for himself: Might I go, Zayda? Or haven't I imagination enough?

She gave in to Dirk, sorry for this hurt he was causing himself.

We went up to the first ledge of the slope, where the orchard broke the green rise of the hill to its whiteness. It was warm; and dry enough even for Janet to sit on the turf. All was one unfolding loveliness—from the long silken blades of grass under us to the blossoms overhead. The year itself could be felt unfolding, with its whole life-event in bud that quivered to be opened. How perfectly place expressed Time—was its expression! The growth around us was only Time made manifest, Time in its alternation of four: seed, stalk, bud, flower. In each, every other was contained. In this moment was all the rest of the year. From it I took anticipation of Clive and Cordelia's story: that in it we might hear all

the rest to be told. For had not Zayda herself chosen this time and place to tell their story?

Even Janet could feel something of this unfolding. She still looked dramatics of longing at Father, one of her constant looks: If only we could be alone, you and I, without the children! But beyond this she had a look of a certain bewilderment that came to her, when she was aware that something did have existence outside her, beyond her last personal claim upon it. Tonight it seemed to be—beauty as Beauty, beyond her.

And Dirk? By the very measure of his resistance I could gauge how far this beauty was invading him. He lay apart from us, on his armless side, back half turned, and mouth set to find irony in whatever it might be that Zayda would tell us. Mouth set, too, against her coming. She had not yet joined us, having made some excuse about towels to hang up and kitchen to sweep. I could feel that her real reason was Story-teller's need to deal with Story, in its first rush through her. She was sculptor before stone in which the image begins to show itself; or painter when color first flows liquid into form, creating it. Well I knew how it was with Zayda when she said, 'You all go on up first'; and how it was now with her, as she came up slowly, absently—walking as I myself so often walked, with Story working!

Against Zayda as the very beauty around him, Dirk lay there apart, and drawn into himself, striving to hold this self within the form that wanted an arm; and with this to hold all things—the bloom above him to the wood of its branches, with some of these gone or hanging broken or dead; and Zayda, to the last definition of Girl in his mind. But when Zayda had come and had begun to tell her story, with her full gift for it in word and gesture, then, in spite of himself, Dirk was drawn back to us, to look and listen, his armless

side up, either forgotten or given . . . Hardly less rapt than myself now, Dirk listened—as if seeing what he heard.

* * *

When a year is good for fruit, and trees bear to breaking, one thinks: Here is where the money is on a Farm; I should rather be putting in an orchard than bothering with cows or sheep. (So, Zayda said, it is with all farmers, not only with Clive Aylor.) And it is true enough, the money is here *this year*. At the height of the affluence one does not stop to think that this is one year in three or five; the next one will be an alternate of rest, and after that there will be a frost, likely, for frosts do not waste themselves on the alternate years, but wait for the blossoms. If you have only to divide the year's returns by three you are lucky; it is more often five with fruit. But you do not divide, you do not balance the years on a farm, you take each one as the only year of gain or loss in your life. If it is gain, you do the things you wanted to do last year and could not; and if loss, you put them off yet another year. Some men make a business of farming, but more do not; they live the extremes, knowing the fat year as fat, and the lean as lean, not making one offset another and give a middling result. If it were not so, a farmer would never feel wealthy—the balance would never leave him rich; whereas if he takes one year and lives it fully, why, that year he is able to match any man for having money in his pocket to spend.

Clive Aylor was this kind of farmer.

— Now who—Clive? A Hayes, but not on the side of the men but the women: through his mother, who was Old Hayes' sister, much younger than himself, as Mister Kirtley's father was, too. Old Hayes was almost grown when the two other children came: he fathered them from the begin-

ning, and so severely that Clive's mother went off early, to a school somewhere farther south, and she married Clive's father there and bore Clive, and only came back when she was a widow and in need. She died here at Hayes El, and then Clive lived here until Old Hayes packed him off to school.

As I have told Miss Julia, Zayda said to the others, there are two kinds of Hayes men: farmers and scholars. Old Hayes knew well enough Clive was the scholar; but he tried to make a farmer out of him in his desperation for a son. You see . . .

Effort now, in the telling; check to the flow: could we possibly understand without having seen?

— You see, Old Hayes had but one son out of all his marriages. One legitimate son. And he, Brent, wasn't—isn't—quite right; he is epileptic; and so there was no one for the land but Drake Parker, after Mister Kirtley went away; and as Drake refused it—Old Hayes was desperate for the land. So he put Clive also through the agricultural college, hoping somehow to bring it all down from his head into his hands.

Back to Clive, she was fluent again, and went on in one swift flow:

— Clive met Cordelia at college. Though he lived neighbor to her here, he had to go to college to meet her. There was a reason for this, one bound to Old Hayes, as all things here are. It was between her people and him. Her people came as foreigners to this place; they are of a different nation, they are Hollanders. However they happened to come here seemed all chance until Clive married Cordelia. Then it could be seen—they too were part of Old Hayes' life, part of the destiny of this whole place. For it is my belief—no, it is more, I know, I have myself lived it—there are places like

this marked for destiny, and by one man. When men are as Old Hayes was, they make such places. And no one who comes to them can escape the reach of their lives. I know, I have seen this and lived it, and I am telling you all—be careful, even as strangers you may find yourselves bound to Old Hayes' life before you leave! For Old Hayes is not dead, he lives in the least thing here, this grass under us, grass he planted . . .

Intense as she said this, she eased again—perhaps to Janet's shudder at her words, or just in the balance of her nature; and she went on more lightly:

— But about Cordelia. Her people held one of the few pieces of land Old Hayes could not get. Like Miss Eldora, they held out against him, though it was for a different reason. No one knows just why, it was so ingrown into them. They were such an ingrown people—all things in their life made them so. First, their coming here as foreigners and feeling strange. Old Hayes himself saw to that, he made everyone feel this was his land—he had some eternal and God-given claim upon it. But they were strange enough in themselves, to life itself. Ingrown they were, there is no other way to describe them. They never seemed to straighten up altogether when they walked, and look out of their eyes. Both old Jan and Minna Dekker were terrible workers: they actually became bent over by very work. They were young when they came, but they worked themselves old in a few years: they took on one shape, working together. Labor bent their body, but there was something else working the same shape upon their souls. It was no mere bent body you saw when you saw them! Maybe you can imagine this in a picture . . . If you say the word 'will,' you think of something straight, don't you?—going straight forward in time and

space, like an arrow. If you say 'will-not'—what do you see? Isn't it something bent back upon itself, a bent straightness? This was the way you could feel the Dekkers their life through—strong as Old Hayes himself, but not-willing, instead of willing. To everything—not just to Old Hayes—they said one word: No! Ask them anything at all, maybe only to come for a visit, or to church. No! They would answer you before you had finished. However they had said Yes to each other to get married, no one could imagine. Sometimes people wondered if they were married, if maybe they weren't brother and sister. You see, they hadn't any children—not until Minna was as old as Elizabeth. Then Cordelia was born . . .

But Zayda leaped this miracle of willingness, this one momentary saying of Yes to life, as too profound a mystery; and she landed on more outward ground with:

— Strongest of all they said No to Old Hayes when, on his way up the road, he came to buy their place. He had a reason; you'll laugh at this—but don't think it less a reason because it is funny. The Dekker land lay between two pieces of his own, on both sides the pike. At that time the pike was privately owned; and in between these two farms of his, on the Dekker land, there was a toll house and gate. Every time Old Hayes went from one to the other—and he went a hundred times a week—he'd have to pay toll, for the Dekker land was tightly fenced, there wasn't any way you could slip through. Now of course it wasn't the money, it was just that the will of another man and the power of his money were saying: You shall not pass, not even you, Old Hayes! Each time this goaded him to fury. For you must understand—Old Hayes thought all was his land. He was willing enough to buy it back, and at a good price; but it was a buy-

ing *back* in his mind, he held it all his own by some special kind of inheritance. I think the deed to it in his mind was his love for it, and his knowledge how to handle it.

— You must see, it wasn't the money. He tried first to buy the pike itself at a high price. But this was tied up in an estate, and then the county was beginning to think about taking it over. It wouldn't, perhaps, for another ten years; but meanwhile it could not change private hands. Next he went after the Dekker land: if he could get a strip of that on each side, he could get around that gate and see all this official red tape in hell, with pole as tinder for its burning. He started on the Dekkers—that was just a little while after Cordy's birth. He had tried before to buy it all; but he had recognized the force with which they said No. Now he went after just enough to build a road around that gate. But it was No, still, just No—not for any price.

— You're wondering why, when they had nothing to lose. I can only say again—there are laws of destiny working, in us, and beyond. I think we have still to see why the Dekkers held out against him. And I think—it was something working in Old Hayes' life rather than in theirs. I think for all of us, it is his destiny working itself out in ours.

— Well, but I was saying, Clive met Cordelia in college, and they fell in love, such love as you saw in them for yourself today. It is simple worship in him, and in her—I think time alone will tell all that love means to her. In any case it meant courage enough, even at first, to bring Clive back to her parents and say: This is Clive Aylor, nephew to Old Hayes, I've married him. They looked up then, just once: they looked at Clive. But they did not see him, or his love for Cordy, or Cordy's love for him. No, they saw outside only what they saw within: Old Hayes, come for their land, taking this new way to get past that toll gate. And they just

cried No! And they drove her away, seeing only that one image of their fear—Old Hayes.

— For a while it did not matter to Cordy, she was glad to live free of them. Old Hayes was generous with Clive at the start, and gave him some land, and enough money to stock it. But soon trouble began. Clive put all he had in one thing, and the best: he started where most farmers end—with the finest of registered stock. He paid a thousand for a bull and five hundred for a heifer. Now Old Hayes did not have much use for registered stock. He used to say: 'They are at the top going down, I am at the bottom coming up.' So this displeased him at the start. Clive did pretty well, however, getting twenty-five a service for the bull; and when the heifer calved, she proved to be all he had claimed for her: she gave thirty-two pounds of butter fat against an ordinary cow's fourteen. He began to feel independent too soon, and broke with Old Hayes outright. Then his bad luck began. One day he and Cordy were standing at the window looking at their fine bull in the barn lot. Clive was pointing out its fine points—crest of neck, barrel of heart and all the rest; and he was saying: It pays to have only the best. A storm blew up as they stood there, not much of a storm, but one coming pretty close in its first claps. They happen this way in the country in single places, as if picking them out. Cordy was only just thinking about closing the windows when—Clive screamed. Her heart stood still unto its own death in seeing—the bull dead in the barn lot, his flesh burning.

— This was the beginning and it went on. The heifer was next: milk fever, at her second calving. Clive had taken every care, he had stayed up all night to see her through it, he had a pump ready. But somewhere he had not sterilized enough; she went delirious, galloped about, went down on

her side—all before he could so much as call for Cordy who was sleeping with all hope in the heifer . . .

— You must understand how it was for Cordy from the beginning—how all hope of Clive in her was one taken in life itself against the dark and dumb and deadly thing she felt in her parents. She had grown up so frail and frightened under their fear. This is why love was so marvelous for her—it was all the life and light she had ever known. You must understand this, else you wont see how she came to be as you have seen her.

— But this death of the bull and the heifer: this only took what they had, not what they were. Now Cordy herself almost died, in giving birth to her first child; and the child did die. And then death struck at Cordy's father, and then at—Old Hayes. Old Minna now was left alone, and out of all this death something terrible began to happen to her. She began to take life from death. It may be hard to understand this, but it seems—when a person cannot live in himself he lives off someone. Old Minna seemed only now to be born as herself out of all this death. When the heifer and the bull went she said: 'My cows are alive while his are dead!' She began to gloat in this way over each thing until—when it was Old Hayes—her triumph was complete. She was over eighty herself by now, and had been bent almost double. But now she looked up and straightened up, and began to take life not only from the dead but the living. From Cordy. Word by word, in things she said about Clive, and love and life, she began taking it from Cordy . . .

— They had to go and live with her now, for they kept on losing, one thing after another; and Cordy had another baby; and besides the old woman needed to have someone with her. She took Clive on as a hired hand, paying him little, working him like a slave. But this wasn't the worst of it.

You have yourselves seen this, in what she is doing to Cordy. This seems to be her way of still holding out, this side of the toll gate: not letting Old Hayes through, dead or alive. Clive as himself has dropped out of the picture. He never really lived as this for Old Minna. It was always Old Hayes, or something Old Hayes stood for. But why, you may wonder, is she taking it out of Cordy? These truths of the spirit about people are not easy to see through all at once; they take a lifetime, and more sometimes. One can only feel here that Cordelia's life is bound somehow to Old Hayes', and deep in herself somewhere Old Minna knows this, and so she continues to strike at the man down the road through Cordelia. I can myself imagine how this is: how Old Minna bore into Cordy something she never knew herself, either of love or life. For her to look at Cordy, hopeful and happy still in Clive, through all misfortune, must make her feel deprived; and in feeling so, she strikes out to hurt, even to kill, what mocks her own wanting. It is after all the struggle I spoke of, the will against the will-not. It is something come to Old Minna through Old Hayes: come into her own blood, into Cordy . . .

— But, however you explain it . . . Old Minna is living today off something that lives in Cordy. She is past ninety, she has had several strokes. But she grows in determination to outlive everyone. And she keeps killing things off, in all that she says. Each thing that Clive tries to do. Now it is the orchard. 'You'll see,' she has been saying since he planted it, 'you'll get no more money for these fine apples of his; and anyway, frosts and bugs wont care how fine they are, any more than lightning cared about that fine bull.' So, on and on, it goes. Perhaps from this you can imagine why Cordy is counting so on the apples. People around here think it is only for the money they will bring, to relieve her of her care

of her mother, to get help, or a washing machine, or things like that. But I think it is much more. Something like life itself, that Cordy is striving to prove, against something like death, in her mother. And I even think that this has come to Cordy through Old Hayes: that somehow it is their lives that are bound, that Clive is only a kind of thread between them. But of course this is only what I think, and I have, as you know, a queer imagination . . .

Zayda jumped up now, lightly, with that perfected ease of hers, and that flashing suddenness. And she abruptly started away with this word about herself. We all remained lost for another moment in what she had said. Dirk was the first to be released. He leaped up to go after her, calling: Wait, I'll walk part of the way with you, it will be dark in the valley.

Zayda called back: Dark is as day for me in this place, with all so familiar. But Dirk ran after her, crying again, as if out of himself: Wait!

Janet came to herself with: But, Larry, do you realize, she is a servant!

To this Father answered with his whole thought of Zayda and her story: She is wise, with a very old wisdom.

And then aloud, he repeated to himself a few words, as if they were of this wisdom: Forces of life and death, of preventing and letting be, of love and resentment of love, of will and will-not.

Janet increased in her objections to: But this is all superstitious, one person living off another, or the dead living on. It is positively primitive, it is atavistic!

Yet as we walked down the hill Janet stopped and shuddered against the cool night wind blowing up: Good heavens, do you think we might have a frost?

This is my question, each morning, until the end of April. Now bloom curves the tops of the trees as with snow—that solidly. Each morning I rush to the window upon awaking, to look at the orchard. I am not myself standing here, but Clive, waking to a thought of it, standing there at his window, seeing the fruit grow from the bloom, fall softly into baskets, ship itself away, and return in a stream of silver coins into his hand. I become Clive—as he turns from the sight of the trees back to the bed where Cordy still lies in her weariness, to see this weariness, in all the scenes of her days, lying years-long behind her. This is another moment for Clive like the one in the orchard, when her hands prayed to the tree. It is vivid, not with her prayer, but with all that has given rise to it.

Now in looking upon her he sees: all the steps she has taken through these years, all the minute things done, all the rasping words said by the Old Lady. He sees these words, falling upon Cordy where she lies there in the bed, in visible strokes of their intention as, backward through the past day, he follows her own weary, stumbling thought. He becomes Cordy, bending to lift the body of the Old Lady—it is not heavy, only resistant, a skeleton of bones that have turned to lead; taking from under it a soiled and a wet sheet; lowering the body again to a beat of words about being careful; taking the sheet then to a tub, filling this, carrying water, bucket after bucket, hot, on a hot day . . . He is Cordy, ironing now what was washed yesterday: lifting and bearing down upon the heavy iron with all her strength. Yet it is not enough, for the smoothness of sheets for the sick, or the pleats of a dress for a girl at school . . .

And he becomes Cordy—outside, now, in the garden, grubbing away weeds that are coming with those rows and rows of beans she has planted. Always bending, first to hoe,

then to pick, then to put in jars. He is Cordy on a canning day, hot, and the kitchen a cloud of steam, and Cordy gasping as, from table to stove, she staggers, brushing away the thin wet strands of her hair with the back of her thin wet hand . . . And through all the heat and labor of the summer past and to come, the Old Lady calls and calls, with voice and rap of cane: Cordy, Cordy, Cordelia! He is Cordy hurrying to the call, into the next room, stagnant with the air into which the Old Lady has breathed her undying decay—only to find, too late, she has already wet her bed . . .

Bending and lifting: wet sheet, tubs filled again, the hot water!

Unable to bear being Cordy, Clive cries aloud to waken her—to see the orchard, symbol to him for the end of all this weariness. He goes and lifts her from the bed, to make her waken and see. But he only learns then with his hands what he has just seen. With his hands!—from her body, so thin under the thin outing gown. It is a more vivid knowledge; he shudders as it comes, from bone to bone. She understands, and draws away, trying to full the scant gown over the scant breasts, remembering—other moments like this between them, that bore the fullness of life, and breast, for this touch of his hands upon her.

Most sensitive are the hands of love; sense of touch in love is beyond all seeing. But to the degree that pleasure comes through them, so pain. Clive suffers this now, through hands that feel their curve over her breast empty, their caress of her arms given no responding softness. In all the want of flesh and bodily life in her, he meets in this moment death's immortal requirement of love: for love to claim its experience out of all form and embodied being. Ahead of time: before death, or age, or any natural end to love's embodied being. When hands of love can no longer feel, then

does the lover stand trembling as before Death itself, having to meet the requirement—of very hand to create, out of an immortality of its own, an immortal touch upon the beloved.

Cordelia knows his pain as she has known his pleasure, and suffers it in the same way—but helplessly, for she is so very tired, she has no strength of any kind to help him through it. She can only try to draw away and hide from his new sight. But his hands hold her—for he meets the requirement! They hold, with a new tangibility, creating anew the lovely living memory. With a pure spiritual tenderness, they seek her face, and bring to the pale and thin cheek depression the full red roundness of the apples he has foreseen. His lips upon hers brush her last protests away: But, Clive, I am so thin, there is nothing left of me. No, no, it is not so, you are more beautiful than ever! His love has created the new image! All lovely and rosy and round she is, in the very fullness of fruit growing to its last perfection.

* * *

So every morning I stood at my window, feeling them at theirs. The month seemed eternal with the danger of frost. Let May come, Zayda said, this will be over.

But would May ever come? The month was eternal, too, with its beauty—the days lengthened so full of it as to become weeks of a barer season. Now color came flooding into all outlines, blurring their distinctness: all became one rainbow haze, substance and air, giving space one unbroken extensity. All was one fabrication of pink, pinky tan, brownish rose, rosy yellow. These blended, as the wind blew, into one aery creation of color. The sky retreated with its blue behind the lifting veils of the earth's splendor.

Never a more glorious spring, Zayda said.

It is hers, I thought, it is Cordelia's. Her need is preserving this warmth, this is the answer to her prayer.

But even when the danger of frost was over at last, I felt them there at their window, thinking now of all they would buy with the yield from the harvest. A new mattress for your bed, with springs in it, oh, Cordelia, my girl, you shall have rest, rest for all your weariness! Now she could believe it herself, but still she sagged at his side as they stood there, for still she was sleepless in the nights, now from the excitement of hope, instead of fear.

* * *

Father came again to my room, on the last night in April, to say: I think we should write him about the orchard, and about the whole spring, how fine it is. And about Clive, how it looks as if he would make good this year.

Now I had no protest to make. I had already been writing him in my mind, and even now and again a little on paper, about Cordelia—how she had looked, praying there in the orchard.

The way you wrote about the sheep, he said. I had a letter from him today, just a short one.

But a letter!

He was glad about the sheep, Father said. He just said simply, 'That's splendid, about the sheep coming home to Hayes El.' Then he wrote about his own coming.

To this I remained speechless. But Father answered the leap of question and expectation in me:

— It can't be until toward the end of the year. He writes: 'I can't make it until then. But go on living it for me as you have begun.' That is why I think he'd like to hear about the orchard.

Then Father just smiled all the rest at me: Do it, you can

do it, as he would write about it himself, as he would want to hear of it.

And then he went away, leaving me . . . at my desk, seeking the relief granted me: relief from beauty in the time shared with another, and from the suspense of the year, and the anguish for Cordelia. Relief—in words, from all the imaginations crowding, of April and Cordelia and Old Hayes and . . . ‘What is this, what *is* this, to which you have sent us?’

M A Y

Tomb of Life

'Wait until May,' the Letter said. Now in the first week of it Father gave me more pages to read, with this command in them. And it said: 'Not too early in May. Let the green of the wild cherry at the wall be mingling with that of the cedars; and the cedars halfway up the hill be in the blue of their berries with their new-grown tips matching them. And let the wild grape be in leaf, and heavy upon the cedars, piling light green to blue. . . . Let the orchard be in small fruit: do not be tempted to go on up when the bloom is on: let April be the month of the orchard, go no farther, wait until May.'

So I had been waiting, though often I went to look up to that unearthly position of that hill of the dead. I could see it more clearly marked now, as the sky returned with its blue, and the trees formed their own outlines out of their aerial April atmosphere of blossom and leaf. However tempted, I waited—all of a week—meanwhile committing these new words of the Letter to memory with the rest of it that I knew:

'And only now will the Forest the whole way up be dusky enough for the brightness of the cleared land: only now, the tulip leaves broad enough to bear the full brilliance of the

sun on their shiny surfaces with weight of shadow to balance it. Observe this, my dear Colonel: how the trees will be half in shadow, half light, with their trunks striped and dappled with an infinite wind-change of pattern. I have lain hours on this hilltop watching the endless creations of light and shadow on this peer of all the trees—on those two that are the giants of them all, uplifting the hill still farther, and its burden of the dead. . . .

‘And go in the late afternoon, for the hill lies to the west, the wall of the graveyard includes the sun where it is in May: all its light then is caught by the trees and broken into beams by the branches. The hills of the valley will be blue with distance for the sight, to free it from its last earth connections; and you will see it detached, with an outward semblance of the inner reality I would have you feel here. In May you will see life etherealized, set free from weight, all movement and atmosphere. From this you should be able to recapture something of our vision together . . . So I am asking you to wait.’

But not only these words had held me—but the work of May, too, in the garden. Early we planted it, at Zayda’s direction, just before the full of the moon. Janet said, of planting to the moon: How superstitious! But Zayda just smiled: Yes, I know. But anyway you do it. Does not the sun make things grow? Why not the moon then, that is but the sun reflected? And anyway, with all so much use on earth, why should there be such waste in heaven, of moon and stars?

There was more enchantment than argument in what she said; but it won Father all the more for this reason. So to the moon he planted his first garden, on a cleared curve of the next hill, going toward Zayda’s. He had himself prepared the land; he was half of April doing it. Probably the

Letter said somewhere, 'Put the plow to the earth for me,' because he did it with a certain visible consciousness of doing it for another—for the one whom, now everywhere, I saw moving and smiling with the words: Yes, yes, do this . . . and this . . . I was never alone now, I slept and woke to the presence.

And Father projected other images as he plowed: of horses driven to the caisson and limber, bearing the guns of war for the destruction of the earth—that, here, lay so tender to the seed. The picture of Father plowing contained its opposite: the furrow lay to the trench, the seed to the dismembered body of man and the steep valed silence to air ripped and torn open of all the sound it can be secret of. And the peace that enveloped him—his personal peace—was a haze of evening light and color even in the morning, around the rigid outlines of the warrior, with face and shoulder and hand set to the deed of death. Father's posture in plowing—the forward lean with the reins around his neck—left the soldier standing above him, all but self-forgotten. The projection I saw now was no more than a ghost of his past identity, haunting him only as a memory.

We all went to plant the garden—Janet too, though she kept protesting: Why go to all this bother when we could buy from Cleony's garden, or Zayda's? The labor of it!—Larry, you are getting positively stooped by it already! (She saw it as stooped; I, as an inward leaning away from command to a new humility.) Yet Janet felt something as the seeds went into the earth: she looked at the odd beaded seed of the beet in her hand, surprised by it and made uncertain, with an unvoiced question in her eyes: Where does the beet come from, what is it? Even Janet was asking a measure of the question in my own mind: Whence? And how the different forms, large and intricate, from the simple round

or oval? How color, and sap, and scent, and taste? I looked to the seeds lying so small in my hand with a shocked sense of their immanent dynamics: of how, shortly, they would burst open, dying themselves in the act, falling away, but sending forth from their death (in this their dynamics!) a new and other life, tender out of their hardness, green out of their brown, long out of their tiny roundness. The plants grew to inner anticipation in all their metamorphoses: from tendril root, through stalk and leaf, to bud and fruit. (O little tombs of life, what power unseals you?) Process itself: self-intelligent, and determined-to-be: process as will and design brought a whole new wonder. I considered now—that which we call the chemistry of earth and plants and think we have explained with a name for substance. I saw how we translated life into words; but how we lost the original reference of these words in the translation, except in poetry. Here man still said the words earth and seed, fruit and flower, star and sun, with the full wonder and mystery of their being; but only in poetry: in all other speech he lost the life of these words in the translation.

In what Zayda said of Old Hayes as we planted I could feel in new and direct ways how this man had not lost essence of seed and earth in any translation. To Janet's complaint of the labor she said: But in farming labor *is given* value, it does not give it. Old Hayes always said that you cannot count labor in farming, it is a gift of the self as an art is, a free service. When it becomes a thing meted and measured it will die in its living nature. He always said, these are his very words: 'Don't talk to me about the economics of farming, there are none in nature or anywhere else where life is itself.' And he would point to a turkey, maybe, and say: 'Eight months to grow, thirty minutes to eat and look at the feathers left over. Let a man stint of himself to the

earth and see what she will do in return for him.' And he said over and over: 'We don't need economics in handling nature, but nature in handling economics.'

Wonder in me grew of this man with his knowledge in his hands, not his head. I grew more impatient to climb to the hilltop when Father gave me a dozen more pages of the Letter, saying: Here is the part about Old Hayes; but he wants us to read it up there, in the graveyard. Put it with the rest you have, and we will take it up some evening, together.

But Father kept working on, until dark, in field and garden; and May grew to the letter's last requirement. I could no longer wait! My impatience was not just my own but—his. Across all the space he was distant he seemed to be saying: Now the time has come, go now, this evening. And it seemed he was no longer talking to Father but to me! However unknown I was to him, it was to me. And, as if he spoke in the night, I wakened each morning to: Go now, go this evening.

At last, after a week of such evenings, in which all conditions of blue and green, of brightness and dusk were fulfilled, I went—without Father. I felt a kind of child-fright in going alone, but exultance at the adventure. I ran!—like a runaway child, not wanting Father now to see me and follow. I wanted to read and respond to reading—alone.

All the way up I saw what he had written. Green fruit in the orchard. I thought of Cordelia and wondered: Did he know of her, in the way I had written? What a risk I was taking, in this way I was writing to him! It was not a risk of being misunderstood but—understood. How wonderful, how frightening with wonder, that would be! Really, I thought, I must not write as myself again, but strictly as Father. Yet all the way up, I wrote in my mind, as myself: I hope you wont mind my presuming to come in Father's

place; but he is so very busy with the corn and the garden, and the blue is on the cedars, and five o'clock has come with the light just right, breaking to star beams behind the great trees; and I am free to go as he is not, and drawn, compelled, by your letter, as by the time itself . . .

How right the wind was! I should have to speak of that. The saddle-leaves are not blowing, just hanging pendent and fluttering under the lean of the light upon them. The great trees are no longer continuous in their straightness but leaf-broken, sun-slanted and shadow-hidden; yet they bear their shaft through all interruption, they are mighty and whole of it for the hill's consummation.

I had come to the top, I was here before them—those two giants of them all: the one tall and man-straight to its top, the other massively bending, as with a woman's shape, but then straightening and going on up to the height of the other. But now all writing stopped in my mind here, before the stone wall, its rounded enclosure of the graves and the tombs. All thinking, even, was hushed to the silence of the two great silences that were here: of death and growth. Silence of sod on a grave; and of the trunk of a tree, thick to the flow of sap within it, still to all this movement. And yet another: of stones in an old wall, gray of age, crumbling in it to softness. And of the stealth of ivy growing between them; and the hush of moss on the top. And another and another: all silence, increasing. One of distance, far blue distance, of hill rising from a River that was condensed as mist into a veiled shining: only in this way seen, and not heard, silent in the moment of all travail. But greatest of all: silence of death, and of growth.

I did not break it as I climbed the two steps to the top. (There was a gate but it was locked: this was the way the dead came, the steps were for the living.) I walked softly

halfway around, to where I could face the tombs. They were but slabs, simple, in no way monumental: they left this way of being to the two great trees above them. On them were names, three outstanding: Brent, Kirtley, Hayes: these in different arrangements. Two tombs bore the name Brent Hayes, and in the lower part of the second was written: Old Hayes. Before the slab there was no grave; the earth lay unbroken, unmounded.

I sat upon the wall, face to the yard, and took out the Letter. Eagerly! And not only to hear of the dead, but of the one who was writing.

'You will see the name Old Hayes—you will have heard it before this, from Cleony and Zayda, and everyone you have met. And perhaps, if you have listened very closely, you will have heard it from other sources—a kind of call to one absent: Old Hayes, Old Hayes. To me as a child the very hills gave the name back; it was spoken to them so often, it was lived into them. Unable in the end to give a son to the land, Old Hayes gave himself. You will see—there is no grave for his stone. This is the reason, he is not here. Of all the others there are bones and ashes, but not of Old Hayes. For him you must look elsewhere—out on the land, in the orchard, in the forest, down at the house on the rose-bed—in such places went the ashes of Old Hayes, these are his graves. As for his soul, it is not here either, but in all those places where the ashes went and in many more; for the soul has so much more extensity—wherever a man loves, there it can be. I am hoping that you have met this part of Old Hayes before, that you have not come here to find him. He is here too, for he loved this place, he laid it out; but he is in the wall that his hands themselves built, white hands to the black ones helping him. And in the two trees—no, he did not plant them, they came a century before: but he fed and guarded and

pruned them; through wind storms and lightning he prayed for them with the only sort of prayer he ever made, half threat and half promise. In a bad storm he would say: For every tree saved, God Almighty, I'll plant you another! And he did: a young forest, now almost a century old, stands for these earthy prayers made to Deity, the only one he knew or acknowledged, God the Maker of Earth—no mention of heaven in his creed!

'When I speak of his soul perhaps you will wonder a little. Perhaps you have heard of his greed and his lust, a woman seduced, an illegitimate son; and maybe of some of his invectives. (Cleony tells of one—how he would cry to a cloudless sky in time of drought, saying: My God, you made the earth, why in the hell are you trying now to destroy it?) You will wonder about this soul that seemed to be all body. In truth they cannot be spoken of separately; for in him they were a unity. But the spiritual achievement of his life lay precisely here—in this unity. Men even less frequently unite body to soul than soul to body. The first may seem a perverse way of achieving the union, but it is practical; and I think it may well be the first step we must take in the immense task of such unification before us, as men of the earth.

'In any case—men who divide themselves are forgotten, be it in art, science or farming. Men who unite, they are not just remembered as they are, they never cease to be. If you bring all you are to any one word or deed in your life, you make it immortal in Time. So Old Hayes. Every bit of him went into everything he said and did: stride of feet, bend of back, labor of hands. His labor was his sensitivity; his thought was his action; his will and his feeling were his spoken word. Look to his stone again; know—he is not here. Know this strange immortality of his: one that is not risen

from the earth, but descended into it: one that is really a mortality, but an eternal mortality in Time.'

I looked from the Letter for a moment, to the stone, through these words; and up to the trees, and out over the great valley—all his, with all of himself given. If you bring all that you are! And how marvelous this All: how infinitely much more than a man knew or dreamed of himself at any one time! I returned to the Letter in eager pursuit of this intimation:

'There is no better place to begin than with his name Old Hayes, in trying to understand him. Cleony has doubtless told you by now one or another of her mammy-stories of his birth. You may believe the essence of them: he did come too soon, and feet down, as if he couldn't wait to touch the earth. And he walked too soon, no one could stop him, and he bowed his legs for life from the effort. He looked old at birth; many babies do, but he never lost the look, he only increased in it. He bore no resemblance to either parent or any relative; his poor mother came to feel him as a changeling—and I am not so sure; perhaps he did crowd someone else out, her true firstborn, in trying to get himself born. In any case he was always strange to her, a little repulsive. Only when my father was born, fifteen years later, did the true blood-family seem to begin. Old Hayes seemed so to frighten her she did not bear any other in all this time. My father and Clive's mother and another who did not live long, all bore a family resemblance. But not Old Hayes. You have seen some of his differences by now in the chairs of the house. I look very much like my father and somewhat like Clive through his mother. Old Hayes was as short as they were long (and I am longer) and quite as broad as we all are narrow. He had an overlarge head increased in size by an up-standing shock of thick hair that never thinned and never

changed from a grayish tan color. His loins were over-muscled, and his arms too: they grew bowed like his legs to a grip of great strength, but this served to balance the legs and correct the emphasis. He was handsome in a fierce, restless, leonine way, but hardly in any other. His mother never overcame an aversion, half fear, to his looks. She died before he had grown to his full power and it was just as well, or no mother-feeling whatever would have survived the shock. His father died when he was twenty-five, almost as fearful of him as his mother had been. He had been running the place since he was eighteen; for whatever his father's knowledge and ambition for the land was, those of Old Hayes dwarfed them. Father gave up to son long before his death. After this Old Hayes became as a father to his brother and sister: both grew into feeling their parents as grandparents who were dead.

'You will hear that no women can stand Hayes El—which means Old Hayes, living or dead. Clive's mother was of her own mother's genre: frightened of Old Hayes, unequal to him as father-brother. She left when she was sixteen to go South to school and at eighteen married there. So, womanless, the house was left until my father married in England and brought his wife back. Old Hayes himself did not marry until he was almost forty-five . . .

'Now when I tell you that for all his virility—those massive loins of his aching for the stride of love—he knew no woman in any way, perhaps you will understand that what he gave the earth was all his passion, its strength and imagination. He began with the five hundred acres of El Farm; at eighteen when he took over the place, he added a few hundred more; all the rest followed after his father died, they were his own. He lived frugal of his strength, giving it all to labor, eating only what gave strength—nothing for

pleasure or gratification. He grew more and more in the shape of his labor; his gait that of straddling a furrow; legs spread when he stood, still farther in the posture of hoeing. Within he grew in a knowledge he seemed always to have had, one that was sudden and sharp and instinctive, of the earth and skies, sun and moon, wind and the four directions of its blowing. He was to the land what the sailor is to the sea: it was bound to the whole cosmos for him; he looked to the sky for what the earth might be expected to do; he followed rhythms in planting as a sailor would follow tides; and he was keen to wind and directions. (With his wide-spread stand he looked all the more on the land like a sailor at sea.) Clouds spoke to him—where other men guessed about the weather, he read it from them. He spurned no superstition or tradition of the ancient cosmic relation of things: he tried planting and not planting by the moon, and took his knowledge from the results, not from any theory about them. When one or another tradition of farming was declared unscientific, he only smiled at the limitation of a man's thought, within the infinite circle of his instinct and intuition. He knew in bones and blood what other men set about mechanically to discover. His methods of knowing proved far more infallible than any other in the countryside: he saved crops when other men lost them; but with the same wisdom he sacrificed them to the land when others saved.

‘The time of his life was no one year or another, but the whole of it: he expected to live a century through, and he planted for this century, and then for another—the life of a son. And a still longer time stretched in his mind from all his calculations: the time of the earth itself, of the life of man. Religious in no other way, materialistic (though only in terms of land), and physical in all his feeling, still his vi-

sion of life and of time was endless: the earth was man's divine inheritance, to be handled with worship and perpetually restored with what was taken from it. His labor was worship. He was like a small god in himself working each week on a new creation of a boundless world. He always rested, like a god, on Sunday; not an idle rest, however, but one devoted to thought of the week to come and its work. He did not mingle thought with labor, he divided no energies. When he hoed, he was himself the rhythm of hoeing; when he sat down to think, he was all thought—he was as inert then as at all other times he was active. I have seen him sitting in one of those sawed-off chairs of his as intent in thought as a mystic at meditation. It was thought of what he meant to do the next day, perhaps; but I think it was also meditation.

'Such was Old Hayes. This is not the story of his life—that would fill a book in itself. You will hear this on all sides, best of all from Zayda. She was hardly grown when he died, but she knew him better than any other, with her peculiar kind of knowing. He was very fond of her, though her birth mocked him in being of another man, from the one woman in all his life who fulfilled what he in himself needed in a woman.

'Which brings me to the rest of what I want to tell you myself of him, to prepare you for someone you may or may not meet during your year at Hayes El; but for whom, if you do meet him, you will need some preparation. And this is . . . Drake Parker.

'Now lift your eyes as you read this and look across the road and all the cleared land of the valley, to an isolated eminence of land, a kind of mound, with a young growth of trees mounded to its shape. Barely above them you will be able to make out the roof of a house.'

I lifted my eyes, and saw or concluded I saw this roof.

'This is Hayescroft farm and house, that Old Hayes developed and built for a son to be born of him. As El House is on the first five hundred, Hayescroft is on the rest of the five thousand. It is all only half a century old; but in architecture and all countenance, it bears that look Old Hayes imparted to everything his hand built or planted—of the timeless. It is more beautiful than El House, and as true a growth. However frustrated and distorted the life within it has been, it stands with the look of his dream of it, and his intention. Its position is significant, on a hill that rises half-way from the level of El House to the point where you are sitting. Unconsciously perhaps, but with an inner truth to himself, Old Hayes placed death as high as he could get it toward the clouds, and on a narrow point of attainment; but life he developed broadly to include all that he saw, and that his hands could reach for. You have a perfect picture of his life in El House low in the valley, Hayescroft on land rising, and this place where you are cresting all his possessions. It is significant of his life that he came back to Hayes El in the end and died here, instead of Hayescroft. This will point you to the supreme frustration of his life that brought end back to beginning.

'Of his first two marriages let someone else tell you. The first he kept waiting so long she was barren of body and soul by the time he married her; and the second was a complete error from the way of his life. After Eldora Goddard refused him he married a widow with two boys, thinking to get sons in this way, if no other. He was sixty, you see, and had no son yet. But the woman had married him only for plunder, and he soon drove her off. Then he turned back to the blood, in a violence of reaction, went south on a visit to kin-folk, and returned with a wife who was a second cousin. He

was past sixty, she over forty. He had no love for her; but she was of his own blood, and she too wanted a son—her life had been starved to motherhood. Together, he thought, they ought to be able to engender that son he sought *for* himself, *of* himself, in some mystery of desire in him that he could not begin to fathom. He thought it was only for the land, the enormous inheritance; and he thought that if a son were born twice over of his blood and bone and his life-desire, he would be all the more worthy of it.

‘Can you not imagine the belated intensity of desire brought to this union, that was loveless in itself and sought to create life without love, only out of the blood, not from any soul or spirit? For three years there was no child, and she was steadily growing beyond the age for one. I was myself born in these years at Hayes El. It had been empty for all the years my father had been in England; but now he had come back, in time for me to be born here. Can you not imagine the jealousy of Old Hayes, of my birth? Whatever other meaning it had for him, it acted upon his destiny to drive him yet farther into his hope of a son for himself. Perhaps it even brought about, in the next year, birth at last of a son to him—when he was sixty-five: birth of Brent.

‘You will have heard something by now of Brent Hayes—of his epilepsy, his fits of idiocy. But just Brent by himself you cannot understand. You must also know of Drake Parker. And now I come to . . .

‘Let me give you a picture of it. One day when Brent was about four—when Old Hayes was beginning to realize how he was going to be—he went off to buy up a small strip of land, not important in itself, but lying between two other pieces he had. It was the holding of an Irishman lately come to this country for his inheritance: a man who had a dream in his mind of a much larger and richer inheritance, and who

was said to be ready to sell the paltry thing it was, and go back to Ireland. Old Hayes went down to buy it. And there—it is nothing to be told, it is a picture! In the doorway of the small house on the 'place he saw a woman: she came to his call from outside, just to the doorway, and stood there. Perhaps the light was shining through some thin stuff of a house dress: perhaps he saw the superb body in full outline, with beauty such as he had never known or even dreamed in a woman. There must have been some way she stood there—to command desire in a man, and such an old man; and yet at the same time be defiant of it. Old Hayes stared at something he saw, in imagination if not in actual form: at Beauty, at Woman, in the living, embodied presence before him; and at these related to the innermost purpose of his whole life—his desire for a son. Here in this woman he saw the mother of that son: he even saw the son as he looked and looked and saw, actually saw . . . How *can* I write this? How make credible the creative intensity of his desire so that it gave him such sudden vision, half memory, half prophecy. Except, my dear Colonel, for that measure of such intensity that you and I have known together in another situation, I could find no word. But to you I can say, this was one of those split moments in time when he looked both ways and saw—the inner continuity; and the woman before him bore the image of it.

‘But let me describe her if I can: Tall, much taller than himself; and strong, much stronger. Cold, marble-colored, statuelike: with a strange color to her face, not of blood but of some blue ichor, it seemed, of a goddess in her veins. (Zayda has this same odd blue coloring; you can imagine it from hers.) And with blue, blue eyes set in a dark shadow of lash and brows and hair—center-parted, but with a wide

white streak of head parting this darkness. . . . No color but white and blue and black; but yet a fire to be felt in her, a blue-white fire of such intensity as he had never known in anyone before except himself: such as only, he had thought, he could himself feel.

‘When he could bring himself to any speech he stammered something about her father. What she said answered nothing he said, rather what he was speechless of. All of it. “My father is not at home to you, nor am I myself, if it is our inheritance you are thinking to get from us at your own price.” Besides the Irish twist to her speech there was in her voice all the Irish charm of contradiction—of that which allures and defies at the same time. And then something individual, beyond all reference to race or father or even land: *intensity against him* which he could measure by that intensity of feeling *toward her* that was striking him through, as lightning, where he stood, still staring and stammering. What she was saying resolved itself into: not at home to *you*, I—not to you! She put it in terms of land, yes; but even Old Hayes knew in this moment it was not the land, not even for himself, but something infinitely more, born of it all in the moment—and between them, as man, as woman.

‘This was the beginning, and they both knew it. Something so strong between a man and a woman is instantly known where the attraction to each other is the attraction of each to the inner purpose of his whole life. It is known as self-knowledge: really, not of each other but of oneself, it is known. (I write this observation from Old Hayes’ life, not my own; but it is something that has always been imaginable to me, of a true attraction between a man and a woman. I mean one of the inner destiny.) It is true: on Daragh Ellen Parker’s side the attraction took the form of a kind of re-

pulsion, or at best defiance; but it was none the less one for the form it took, and it acted all the more on Old Hayes to increase it in him.

'Her father would have sold the place at once to him, but she held out, for no reason, it seemed, but just holding out. But one day Old Hayes came when she was not home, and her father sold it—at five times what he expected it would bring, indeed, almost at the amount he had dreamed his inheritance would be worth. But it was not only the land Old Hayes had come for by now. Daragh Ellen herself came home just after her father had sold it. And outright in her presence Old Hayes made his amazing proposal. It is not only the land I want, he said, but your daughter Ellen; I want her to come and work for me; I want her to manage the house as outside I manage the land. My wife is not strong, and I have an idiot for a son. I want your daughter Ellen to take charge of my house; I will pay her whatever she asks.

'You will wonder, why did Daragh Ellen go then to work for Old Hayes? It would seem, to tempt and torture him, for this was the end . . . And to this more apparent reason one might add another: to try out her own strength, to exercise her own will against him. This carries us a little deeper to the truth—to the working of her own destiny in Ellen. For she must have known somewhere within her that this was bound up in Old Hayes, to one end or another: afterward she proved herself so superb a woman that I think the challenge she took up in going to live in his house must have been one taken against herself as well as against him. I do not mean that she meant to submit; but only that she meant to expose herself to whatever her life, in connection with his, might hold for her. She meant to fight this, as if she had the deep knowledge of destiny within her—that in no case does

the end matter so much as the effort made in dealing with it.

'Fight, Daragh Ellen did: tempt maybe, but resist always; and by some pure power of will in herself as strong as his and as splendid. For a year, in which Old Hayes suffered a whole lifetime of desire for woman and this woman, only this one, none other. Pity him—an old man, almost too old, suffering this all at once, where in another man it would be distributed over his whole life. Pity him enough to understand in part what finally it drove him to—an act in the night, crude, raw, wanting all excuse unless one pities or grants him a fatal necessity. One night, when he could bear it no longer, he went up the back stairs to Ellen's room and took her by force, the force of a young man—and raped her. That is the word for what Old Hayes did to Daragh Ellen Parker—took or tried to take body, soul and spirit, all of her, for which he had a life-and-death hunger, even a starvation. Jacob never lusted after Rachel with more passion for generation than Old Hayes after Daragh Ellen, in the beginning; nor afterward did Jacob come to love Rachel with more tenderness. Ellen was Rachel-Leah to him: as Leah she conceived at once; as Rachel she forever eluded him with a meaning far more than one as the mother of his son.

'And now we come to a night—not to be told of, only to be pictured. Daragh Ellen is ready to bear a child. Old Hayes' wife knows, but she has not sent the girl away; she has not dared. And not only because of Old Hayes, but because of Daragh Ellen herself. I will not go, I will not be driven! was in Ellen's eyes, the strange blue fire of them. So Ellen has stayed . . . if you wonder why, remember what I have said of the natural depth of her knowledge. Old Hayes has offered her everything—to divorce his wife, to legitimize the child, anything and everything, to keep her and the child. She has refused all; she has made no promises

about staying; she has let him wonder from day to day if she will stay. Imagine this torture: child on the way, a son, he is sure of it, he has seen, he can see now; and from one day to another he does not know if she will stay or vanish entirely out of his life. She has been staying; but now as the time draws near, as the very time . . . One night when she has locked herself up since before dinner in her room—he can hear nothing, but he can feel. . . . He paces the floor downstairs, while above—birth and death might be taking place, of one or another or both that have become his life, the whole of it, all that is past as well as all that is to come. She and the child alone give definition to the past, hope of the future. Remember, he is old, almost seventy: they alone are his life and his death, his one immortality. And upstairs in the will of a woman, this is pending. For he feels it there in her will: she can choose to live or die, he believes, and to have the child live or die. He has no ordinary fear of birth for her; he feels that she will be able to bear the child, and alone, she is strong enough for this. But what afterward will she do? Choose life for both? Or in the end, deny him this?

‘Old Hayes is not far from the scene in that room, with this fear. For it is taking place as he walks . . . Daragh Ellen without a cry bears child—it is a son; she has little difficulty, she rests but a short while, then rises far enough to wrap the child up and put it in an open drawer of a chest that, while open, can serve as a cradle, but which, if closed, might also mean a coffin. See her standing there before that drawer for a moment that is an eternity of time for three lives, her hand on it, making in herself the decision. For both herself and child to live, she must go and call someone—Old Hayes himself—for help. For both to die, close the drawer and leave herself unbound and bleeding. Stand on where she

is or make just a little more, that will be too much, effort. To call, to give in that far, to call and say, Yes, this far, to him and his desire: Here is your son, I have borne him to you. Or not to call and bring all to an end in him, all to frustration.

‘Once more imagine Old Hayes downstairs, knowing this—but also knowing, if he goes up and pounds on that door to get in she might be driven to a final resistance. Something in the child’s own destiny seems to hold him where he is, to will nothing in the moment but to let her use her will.

‘So he stays where he is while she—having the will all to herself—wills life, unlocks the door, calls downstairs . . .

‘And the issue of this act of will on her part alone is—Drake Parker.’

* * *

— Jay!

Father had come up after me. He swung down into the yard off the wall, then lifted himself and sat beside me, upon it.

— Oh, I’m sorry, Father, but I could not wait!

He smiled, and spoke softly: It’s all right, I’ve already been up here alone and read all that.

But he reached for his letter and took it from me.

— However, I have given you more than I intended you to have at this time.

— But I haven’t read all you’ve given me. I just got to the birth of Drake Parker.

— That is all I meant to give you. The next page can wait; it is really bound up with much more, and I’m not sure . . .

He wanted to leave the rest unsaid, but I pressed him: Not sure of me?

He glanced down at the page to which I had just come.

— Not exactly, Jay, or at least not only of you. Of myself and Hayes too, and the whole situation here. It seems something not to be grasped in words, as Zayda keeps saying, until one has some kind of feeling of it for oneself. Hayes and I talked of this sort of thing the night we—faced death together. It is all, perhaps, a kind of seeing from the other side, where we were forced to look from, on that night. Or in some way one has to be shocked into it. It seems to be a matter of breaking through the surfaces of things, one's own mind. It should not take death to do this—Hayes and I talked of this that night. Life should do it as well as death—and life does, at times, in places; it really began for Hayes himself here, under—certain—what shall we say?—pressures, intensities.

Father had never spoken so freely, so fully; or with more certainty. This was slow and cautious, but yet certain in each slow step his words took him, toward the mystery. I felt again the contradictions in Father, of person to profession: of the slow search and finding in his words to all the forward-march, that laying hold ahead of time, that forcing and trying to grasp, in his life as a soldier. For to be soldier was to force all being—its very essence was this: to force life toward death. He was revealed to me as he spoke as having come into his very inner existence in reaction from his outer life. To understand him in all ways, one could use this key of oppositeness. It was perhaps not so strange after all, no more than life seeking a balance: hate driving to love, death to life, war to peace, soldier to shepherd. Yes, I felt again, this is the key to Father; and I trembled with expectation before all it might reveal of him.

But he did not go on talking, but fell back into his more accustomed silence for a long time as the sun went white, from its early setting to the hilltop, down into the blue dis-

tance of the river valley, purpling to the blue, taking more color into itself than it gave. Then Father sighed, with my own regret, ever to have to leave the still uncolored serenity of the spot; and rose to go down to dinner. He talked the whole way down, but of the outer situation. He had much to tell me, of things Zayda had been telling him.

On Memorial Day, he said, Zayda says that all who knew Old Hayes make a kind of pilgrimage up here. Even the Widow Goddard comes, and old Minna Dekker used to. And even—Drake Parker. But he only comes when there is no one else, we are not apt to see him. It is his only acknowledgment of Old Hayes as father. You see, Jay, he has steadfastly refused everything Old Hayes offered him, and this was—everything, just as it had been offered his mother. And this is the tragedy, both for Old Hayes and the land. For it seems that Drake has grown up exactly as Old Hayes foresaw him, the true son, of the earth, as of himself. I had to ask Zayda a little about him after reading that in the letter. And she told me: Drake is all and far more than Old Hayes hoped of him.

— You have been talking to Zayda!

— Not so much as it might seem: she says a lot in a few words. She is reticent about Drake, though, as she is about their mother.

— But where does Zayda come into all this? Who is her father?

— It doesn't seem to matter about him; he is dead now. Her mother seems to have married him after Drake was born just to declare herself free of Old Hayes. She didn't marry to legitimize Drake—she didn't try to do this—nor because she had to leave Old Hayes' house: even his wife didn't try to drive her away. But just to declare herself free. . . . Zayda was born of this marriage considerably later—no

relation, you see, to Old Hayes, except to his desire for her mother. But that, perhaps, is a truer one than any of the blood.

Father slowed his step just before we reached the house to something else he had to tell me, something difficult.

— And I've learned something else, Jay; it is distressing. Kirtley Hayes has a sister here; she came back a year or so ago to—to marry Brent Hayes.

I exclaimed my astonishment: But Brent? And aren't they cousins?

It is a wretched situation, Father said. Kirtley is all but unable to speak of it in his letter. Yes, they are cousins and Brent is—as you know—not quite right. His mother seems to have arranged it just before her death. She sent for Kirtley's sister, all unknown to him. She had been unhappily married and divorced. It was an act of some kind of desperation on her part to marry Brent; Zayda herself does not understand whether it was the money or pity or pride—there is in the family a certain pride of generation.

But I protested: How could that be it, when this would be the very end of generation?

Father tried another explanation given by Zayda: It may have been persuasion by Brent's mother. She knew she was going to die, she was pretty desperate about getting Brent married. Zayda says all this is another story. Old Hayes' wife had a considerable will of her own, especially where Brent was concerned. When she failed to find a wife for him outside, she just got one for him in the family.

But now we were at the house. Father stopped short of Janet's sight of him to look back up the hill.

On Memorial Day, he said softly, we must go back up there, for I'm beginning to feel that we too belong here somehow.

I spoke the question that had been growing out of all he had told me:

— Does she come, Father—Drake Parker's mother?

He shook his head: No, she is the only one who does not. Even Drake concedes to Old Hayes, dead, what she refuses him.

* * *

But all May days now were memorial days of Old Hayes as the growth began, all over the land, in long wavering seams of green upon the dark purple of the turned earth. Closer to the sight, patterns of sprouting broke the rows: the fine fern of carrots, the silver-green clusters of pea leaves, the crimson plumage of beets. And so the movement of the more active leaves: the fountain spray of the corn, the umbrella spread of the green beans. Overnight patterns formed, differently, so that each morning brought a changed world. The whole countryside was laid out now as a garden, not commonplace yet with any definition of corn or potato, but all imaginable as flowers. There was no field, even in the great valley, that was not bordered with trees or woodland or hedge: therefore the aspect was sylvan rather than agricultural, and it was all delicately charming.

All through the month wind blew: more often than not, gently; but sometimes, in gales as strong as those of March, but with a different intention. In March this was life-stirring and shaking. Now, with life achieved, it was less serious, it was almost playful. The leaves of the trees took it up largely, the trunks holding their straightness. It was a shimmer and flutter through them, not a bodily tremor.

When Memorial Day came, the winds were strong for that 'detachment' of which the Letter spoke. And the sunlight was sharpened to an almost supersensible clarity. Zayda said

people would begin to come early: if we wanted to watch the pilgrimage, we should have time for little else. Even Janet wanted to see it, she thought it so quaint and naïve. Dirk appreciated its irony—this homage paid to a conqueror. Father and I had the same expectation: of seeing something of Drake Parker.

All day in twos and threes, with clusters of children, they entered by a gate in the field where the sheep were, and climbed the hill straight to the pasture. They brought flowers: iris and peonies and roses, and tin cans of potted plants. The children came with handfuls of crushed wild flowers they had themselves picked: windflowers and violets and bleeding-heart. On the graves they still bore the clutch of little fingers when afterward we saw them. Strange homage indeed to the future when these children, as men and women, would work the land of this man who, dead, still owned it.

We were ourselves waiting until late afternoon, until after Drake Parker might come. Zayda grew a little anxious when she caught no sight of him. Maybe this year he would refuse to come and so give up his last claim to Old Hayes as father. He had been a renter of Old Hayes' land himself, she told us, until lately when he had bought a place of his own. A hundred and fifty acres he had, against the thousands Brent owned, and these either going barren from misuse by renters or back into wilderness.

At four, when we were about to start up, sound of horses' feet far down the road detained us. It might be Drake! Zayda said. He would come by horse; he is a great horseman, same as Mister Kirtley. But then she listened closely and said: No, there are two horses. It must be the Tylers.

We had heard this name before; we had heard 'Prue Tyler' and 'horse' said together, and knew of the Tyler land,

one of the few holdings that were not Old Hayes'. But now Zayda told us more, and it began to come alive, even before the Tylers themselves appeared, in the sound of their horses—in that living sound in this place.

They are no blood kin to Old Hayes, she said, but their lives are bound to his, same as all others are. It was their grandfather who sold the land to Old Hayes' father. It was Old Hayes who kept them down where they are on the river bank, for he never would sell them any other land, though they have tried to buy it. And it has been the place where they live, where Old Hayes has kept them, that has made them as they are, Prue particularly.

She said the name Prue in a special way she had, that meant Story!

There are two of them, she went on, Prue and Jed. They are twins, same as yourselves though with more likeness. You can hardly tell them apart, which is man, which woman. Prue dresses just like Jed, she rides like him and better; she does all things like him, and better. But wait, you will see for yourself, for here they come now!

But we heard and saw, without her pointing them out to us! There, at the pasture gate, two riders, appearing suddenly in a flash of speed. One of them was in the moment bending to unlatch the gate, as a polo player bends to a ball. The horse plunged and reared, refusing over and over to stand; but the rider persisted, with some movement inseparable from that of the horse that brought a cry of admiration from Father, as horseman, and then the words, spoken in a kind of ecstasy of recognition:

— Jay, look, look, that is my horse, that is *my* horse!

Now through the gate—heading toward us—one flash of white face, blowing mane and tail, colored as fire in the sun. While behind, the second rider followed, on a horse that

might have been made of wood by comparison to the first streak of fire.

We had to step aside to its coming. I had to pull Father, horseman, away in the trance of his admiration! Head on, horse and rider came, and passed us, plunging toward Zayda who stood behind us, having withdrawn from the sight, as if with some apprehension. We had to turn to see and hear what followed, all in one flash of movement, one rush of word spoken.

Immediately in front of Zayda the rider brought the running horse to a full stop and dismounted—no! the word is too deliberate—flung himself off. Or was it Prue? We could not tell until the words came. For—it was true: both riders were dressed exactly alike in breeches, shirts, and jockey hats pulled down low over the eyes. The second, on the slower horse, had also passed us and had dismounted back of the first, to hold the other horse that was wildly pulling at the reins to be off again.

When the words came we could hear them, spoken in a woman's voice, though deep and throaty, and full of constrained feeling: throbbing with this, as the words came. They came in rushes and stops, interpolated by the one who must be Jed; but all sounded as one tense paragraph that was full of the force of the happening it described: was in itself something happening in the moment, within the girl who was speaking.

Oh, Zayda! she cried. I told Drake when I took the mare that she was dangerous. I had just gotten her, she was wilder than wild. . . . I told him . . . I just took her up for him to see if she was as good as I thought, I thought her so marvelous; it was his idea to breed her to his stud, she was in season in the moment. What danger can there be, he said, Prue, with two of the best horsemen in Kentucky at the bits? He meant

me—oh, Zayda!—but I could not hold her. Jed can tell you, nobody could, she lifted me up suddenly and flung me down and stepped on me and then let her feet go— Oh, I don't know how—but there he was on the ground, unconscious; and he still is. Oh, Zayda!

And Prue Tyler went on, before Zayda could grasp what she had told her: I tell you, something got into the mare, beyond anything I have ever felt in a horse, it was this that flung me down, nothing just horse. Oh, I'd kill the mare in a minute if I did not feel—it was something got into her beside her own wildness.

Now Jed spoke, inserting his quietness into her intensity: Prue is overexcited.

But Prue only drew this into her own speaking: Yes, I am, and with this other thing that got into the mare. You can't make it less than it was, Jed, there is no use trying. It couldn't have happened to Drake, not to Drake, unless . . .

But now Prue covered her face with her hands, breaking this far to what she said. Still she stood erect, and though her voice throbbed, there was no break, no weakening in it.

Slowly then Zayda—from the silence of her understanding: But Drake—he is not dead?

Jed said hastily: No, no, just unconscious. It may be all right . . .

But Prue cried out again, in unappeased anguish: He is still unconscious. The hoofs struck his forehead straight; it was all like a blow aimed, I tell you.

Then she covered the words again with her hands. Zayda wavered, so that Father and Dirk both hurried to her, but she straightened up again, regaining her wonderful balance, and almost her detachment.

I must go see, she said quietly. And she asked Father: Will you take me, in your car?

She and Father went then, and Dirk and I found ourselves standing before Prue and Jed Tyler. Now I could see Prue more closely, though she had pulled her cap down farther. But I could see the chin and the mouth—the mouth: red-warm and girl-fresh and lovely; red-ripe and tremulous; mouth of a woman no matter how man-strong and rigid the rest of the body. The chin under it was strong and obdurate, but the mouth served to contradict all else: chin, and below, the broad shoulders and hips in the stiff, wide riding breeches. In its trembling now to her anguish, it broke through every other line held rigid against us, seeing her for the first time. I could imagine how we might have met her otherwise: how she met all strangers, wholly withdrawn into herself, using her clothes as disguise and protection against just such impassioned expression of herself as that we had witnessed.

I could hardly spare one glance at Jed, seeing Prue. I only felt him nervous, not so much over Drake's accident as over Prue's intensity about it. He had taken off his hat in deference to me, and his face was revealing what might be more of Prue's features. Still I did not look to see in him more of Prue Tyler than she was showing of herself.

The moment was long and awkward—tense with what was nervous in Jed, taciturn in Prue, defensive in Dirk and amazed in myself. Jed and I came out of our tensions first—I, a little before Jed, though it was only with a futile kind of formality:

—Wont you come in?

Jed answered: Thanks, but we'd better be going—on up to see Old Hayes.

Prue just stood, biting her lip now as if to keep it from trembling. The one horse, free, grazed quietly; the other, Jed still held, though it pulled against him.

Now he gave the rein he was holding to Prue, and turned

to the quiet horse to mount it. The rein seemed to restore her to herself. She hardened away from that expression in her mouth, back into the rigid outline of her clothes, and the strength of muscle and bone under them. She mounted the mare, though it reared and twisted: with perfected horsemanship and more, with an exhibition of an indomitable will over herself and this horse that had just all but killed Drake Parker, Prue Tyler mounted, and in the same moment took the full speed of it at a gallop, with a poise in the saddle against which, it seemed, the very earth before her might break with all its weight against her, and yet not bend—poise that was will, and will that was poise.

But the hill did not break open to the mare's plunging; up the hill the horse tore, toward the sky, as if to rend heaven, earth resisting it. At a canter of a wooden horse Jed followed . . . Dirk and I stood looking after them.

Then Dirk released all he had been feeling in a few words.

I have never, Dirk said, seen a girl like that before. What do you suppose she is like under that hat?

From the mouth, I remembered aloud, I'd say she was lovely.

But then, in another moment—Prue and Jed Tyler forgotten—there were only Dirk and I standing there, gripping hands.

Oh, Dirk, I cried. What does this mean, about Drake Parker?

He responded directly, swept somehow into my own mood.

Ask me what everything means, he said: this house and that hill, that old man up there dead and yet somehow living, and now this wild horse and that girl . . .

I said: Dirk, listen. Zayda must be right, about this place. And it does seem to be with everything, the way Prue Tyler said it was about the mare. Something getting into . . .

Any other time Dirk would have jeered at such imagination in me. Not now. Now he gave grip for grip of fear and wonder, and he said:

— Jay, let's go, even if Father wants to stay. Let's go now before . . .

I shuddered to my own thought: Before we get involved like the others?

Yes, involved, he said. That's the word, though it is Janet's.

My answer came grim with its own realization from me: It is too late, Dirk; we're already involved—if not in ourselves, through Father. He has really come to this place, his whole life has brought him to it, and our lives have brought us to him.

Any other time Dirk would have said, 'Nonsense,' to such inner relationships. But now he was silent except to say after a moment:

— Shall we go on up then, and say with the rest: Old Hayes, we're here?

So we went up. The Tylers had gone, down through the woods on the other side of the hill. But for me, and I think for Dirk too, Prue Tyler was still here, standing before that slab that had no mound under it, and flinging her question about the horse.

An early moon was rising, silver-green to a sky still blue, not changing color to darkness, just deepening into itself. To my surprise Dirk settled down upon the wall and said: Let us stay awhile, and watch the moon.

For the first time in our life together I felt Dirk—indefinite, going free in a kind of dream from those rigid boundaries that usually confined him. His freedom in the moment set me free of him—free to let myself go, along a path arching space and time, in the way the moon rode, to one whose

thought in the very moment came toward me. I spoke to him, in that innermost part of myself where more and more I held conversation with him, to ask him: Now this, what does this mean? What part of the life of the whole place is this accident to Drake Parker? But my question seemed to be his own: all answering thought was but an echo of it, as if life here had come to this question in a course of its own that it was taking, and were hanging in a suspense that was itself the balance of Drake Parker's mind.

We stayed a long while, Dirk quiet at my side, smoking, looking to the moon. When we started down by tacit consent, the hilltop was moon-white, the slope to the house, in shadow. I walked within myself in a new kind of silence, that was neither of life nor of death, but was of some hovering state between them. It was—of something that had been whole, but now was broken: like a break in the earth the feet might suddenly come to, in walking; or like two pieces of a substance and form one held in one's hand, of a fine thing broken. It was this sort of stillness—of a break, and one's first blank sense of something broken.

Just as we reached the moon-paved square of the big back porch, Father and Janet came, from the other side. Janet was saying, of what she had seen with Father: But, Larry, this is terrible, to have to take all this with the place! But what she said did not break the silence; this, rather, claimed even her, voice and all other being, so that—as Father held the door of the house open to her—she went groping, in the full light of the moon, for a door that stood open.

And all through the night it held for me, in a state neither of sleep nor of waking. In the morning I rose to it and went to my desk, having to write it: 'What does this mean,' I wrote, 'this silence of Drake Parker's unconsciousness that has fallen upon us all?'

JUNE

Bride, Waiting

Horses' hoofs on the lane! Where sheep had given peace to it, the horse struck new excitement. The old road fell away now in fright, and it rose in apprehension to the mare's flying feet. And so it was with the fields: they no longer lay in smooth snug curves of the sheep's posture, but were broken up into short waves of motion to the lift and plunge of horse, galloping. Father was keeping the mare!—for Prue, until they could decide what to do with her. Drake Parker was still unconscious, but Lutie, his wife, speaking for him said she was sure Drake would say that it was not the mare's fault. Still Prue could not bear to have her around, for the picture she bore with her. And so she let Father keep her . . .

Father was all but obsessed by the mare! She was horse—flesh and spirit—for all his horse love and longing. Janet had good cause now for her complaint, that was half jealous and half anxious; but Father was beyond hearing her in a region of himself that was quite unassailable. This was the born horseman's feeling for horse. Hayes El had promised this to him from the beginning. Whatever the spirit of that 'promise' mentioned in the Letter, this was one of its embodiments! And horse had become Hilda—the name he gave the mare, after one of the Valkyries. To all Janet said about

Hilda's wildness, Father just answered: But nothing less in a horse would do for either Kirtley Hayes or myself. And he went on riding her every day, putting her through army training.

Zayda supported Father by saying: Yes, I am sure Mister Kirtley would want you to keep her, I am sure he would say too—it wasn't just the mare's fault.

Jed, coming alone, had brought the horse. He had come also for another purpose—to ask Father about the sheep, when he meant to shear them. The wool market, Jed told us, would be in another ten days, and besides it would be getting hot soon. And he said: Prue and I will shear your sheep; we're sort of in the business, but we'll do yours for nothing, for keeping the mare.

They would come, he said, in the next few days, when Prue would be back from the Parkers'. She was staying there until Drake came to: it would not be known until then how badly he was hurt.

When Jed had gone, Father brought the mare up to the porch for us to see her all over. Janet withdrew from the very fire in her eyes; but I looked closely, and I saw that she was superb—spirited, splendid! A reddish bay, almost sorrel, with blond mane and tail carried high with her own pride. Father with loving hands showed me all her points: the long neck, the slanting shoulders and hock, the clean slender legs, head long, thin and nervous, and eyes bold and bulging with the eagle-look of flight in them. In this moment he even forgot Drake, with the warm smell of her flesh close, and the quiver of her sensitivity: her embodiment was all of herself, horse, this her only identity, Drake forgotten—with her so close, and the smell, and the quiver!

Write about her, Father murmured to me: Tell him just how she is, I am sure he will want her even though Drake . . .

I had little more to write when Father said this—only about keeping the mare: all about Drake and Prue and the mare herself was already written. Only this was to be added: ‘Now Father wants to know if he should keep the mare for you to see, even though this happened to Drake Parker through her.’

The final writing of the letter was interrupted by the shearing of the sheep, Jed and Prue coming to do it. Horses’ hoofs on the lane again! I lingered to put them into the letter, saying: ‘In this very moment in which I write, I hear that sound you are straining to hear. Jed and Prue Tyler are coming to shear the sheep. Need I picture them to you? Surely, once seen, those two identical forms, with their strength and skill in the saddle, will remain in that delineation in your mind that all forms here have for you, as for us . . .’

But their coming claimed me after these few words: they seemed lifeless on the page before me to tell of the sight and the sound of Jed and Prue coming. They rode side by side now, at one gallop, that rhythmically fell as one gait on the road, with clatter doubled but not divided. Their horses today were dappled grays: they might themselves have been twins in their likeness. Both riders were wearing breeches of a peculiar green color, almost jade, with white shirts open at the neck, and with great Mexican straw hats corded under their chins. Jed did not remove his hat now, but only made the same salute that Prue gave us; and again I could not tell one from the other until they had dismounted. Then through the open collar of the shirt I saw the one neck softer, descending in a deep line of shadow into an imagination of two full breasts that otherwise were hidden by the stiff white shirt. Before seeing the mouth again, or hearing the voice, I

told Prue in this way, in this one place where the body of her womanhood came through the masculine configuration of her clothes.

Zayda had come running through the hall from the back porch at the sound of their coming.

Have you news? she cried. Any since early morning?

Prue, lifting her head slightly to Zayda, spoke with that throb in her voice held wholly under constraint, and her lips still:

— I said I would not leave until he came to. Well, I am here. He regained consciousness an hour ago.

Zayda said one word: But?

Prue repeated it: But he knows nothing and no one but Lutie. No one but her and no time but—that night they—you know, Zayda.

Yes! Zayda breathed. But thank God for that much!

Then she began to realize the loss: What of the land, Prue? Will he ever—

It is too soon to say how he will be later, Prue answered Zayda, talking straight to her, forgetting us: The doctor thinks he might in time regain all memory. Now it is only one night of time and Lutie. But what he told her that night was of the land, and this he remembers, and he talks of it; so it may be—when he is able to be up he will be able to work at what he remembers.

Suddenly she was recalled to herself, to us, to what she had come to do. She turned back to Jed then, and said abruptly: Well, let us get on with the sheep!

Father had herded them into the barn lot. She and Jed mounted their horses there and began to ride as if playing polo. The sheep scattered like balls, but in the right direction of the barn door. They had them inside before Father

and Dirk could offer to help, both being held by the sight of those two riding, their grace and accuracy, their almost absolute likeness in the saddle.

Nor did they need help with the shearing. Prue and I can manage better, if you don't mind, Jed said. Prue had gone utterly silent again. They had a small machine operated by hand. Prue set it up while Jed caught the first sheep and tied it. They were equally deft holding sheep or guiding shears. They changed jobs frequently, indifferent to which part of the work they did. Prue kept her hat on though she grew hot under it, her skin becoming rosily wet. Still more closely, I saw how girl-red her lips were, and how shapely. Watching her intently, I felt that the quiver today was not in them but in the whole face hovering about the mouth: it was a kind of movement in cheek and chin, faintly spasmodic. I felt her under even more tension today, of something more wholly affecting her than Drake's accident: something bodily affecting her. I had a woman's sense of her, that she was near the break of tears.

The wool fell away to their shearing like a cloak opened and removed. They kept it whole—it lay on the table like a garment, with the warmth and shape of the sheep still in it. As if stealing these, it left the sheep shivering, bare and strange to themselves and their lambs, bleating with a new tone wavering and seeking. I kept feeling Prue through the sheep. If she were to take her hat off, I thought, and that stiff shirt and those breeches, she would emerge quivering and timid from under them, strange to herself that she has tried to identify with these boy's clothes: she would be strange and frightened! I tried to fight off the intimate picture, but it kept recurring: Prue Tyler shorn of these clothes of hers, and of her silence!

Imagination of her grew through an hour until, when they

had to quit working for want of light, I felt as hot and constrained as she. Father and Dirk went with Jed now to another end of the barn, to drench the sheep that had been sheared. Prue did not follow but sat on, crouched, where she had been holding the last sheep down on the table. I was as awkward as a man might have been with her in the moment, as Dirk left with her, instead of myself.

Only after a long moment was I able to say: Wont you come into the house and freshen up a bit?

Her answer came from under her hat, bent now to taking the machine apart, after a long hesitation: Thanks, but I—There wont be time.

Now the lips were quivering. In another moment—a tear! making a curved way over the fullness of cheek. Suddenly the body bent under the constraint upon it, and Prue Tyler flung herself back upon the low shearing table, dropped her head into her hands and wept.

I thought of leaving her alone, but I felt beyond such evasive thinking: No, she has been too much alone. She is to Jed as Dirk is to me: she is the silent uncommunicative one, she can't make that or any other relationship to another.

And I remembered what Zayda had since said of her: Shy, terribly. Folks here think her strange and wild, hardly a natural woman . . .

So I stayed and made an excuse for her crying: You're tired and hot. You work too hard for a girl, you try to keep up with Jed. You see, I know how it is, I'm a twin too.

Slowly she got command of herself and lifted her face, not so much to look at me as to give herself to be looked at. Now she took off her hat, and I saw—I saw—a face of full girlish loveliness, even within an uncompromising haircut of a boy. This was even in the short straight hair, in its lustrous

darkness; and in the chin that was overstrong for a woman's face, but had its structure belied in the mouth, and the softness of skin covering it. It rested uncontradicted in the eyes that were of one shining and darkness with the hair, matching velvet to satin in color and sheen: they were dream-deep with a woman's profoundly unrealized being, but tortured at their surface with a woman's quick, immediate sensitivity. But more than in any of her features the Girl in her had essence in a certain freshness that came palpably from her. It was as the first blooming of a flower—delicate, for all her bodily strength; rose-colored; and not yet fully blown.

Striving against this essence, however, was her man-size and strength; and within herself, a self-denial of it. There was no allure to her beauty, rather an entrenched resistance, a kind of visible standing-against any other's thought or awareness of it. From this a symbol for her came—of Artemis, she who defied the powers of Aphrodite, who was a nature-goddess, patron of fields and rivers, of animals wild and tame: She who rode to the chase, whose garments were girt for speed. Yes! In spirit and form, in its human embodiment, this was Prue Tyler!

But Jed, returning with Father and Dirk, broke into this imagination of her. Prue snatched her hat at the first sound of their coming, crushed it low upon her eyes, and stood up rigidly, all-concealed again of her beauty. As she was leaving the barn, however, she dropped a ball of the string they had brought for the wool bags, and she bent to pick it up. At the same time, Dirk . . . Either he caught a glimpse of her under her hat, or it came through the break in her posture, or from the touch of hand on the twine. He said outright looking after her:

— Why, she is beautiful! But why does she hide her beauty?

I murmured the answer that came in the moment to me: There are legends of women who have disfigured themselves to prevent, or preserve . . .

* * *

They had to come back in the morning to finish the shearing. This time I sat contemplating Jed, not as himself but as Prue's twin. He seemed oddly to have no individual nature, as if he had lost it to hers that was the stronger. He was the same size as she, but his frame did not have her fullness: without this he was lank and bony, his clothes deceptively hid his leanness. All that was held in reserve, under constraint, in her seemed to be wanting in him, so that his nature had no depth: he was just shy, with nothing held in check; silent, with nothing to say. One could feel him to be overactive in not having any depth of being: as alive only in labor. Riding, or busy with sheep, he bore resemblance to Prue in agility and keenness; but not standing still: he stood pale of her coloring, blank of the full secretive script of her inner being.

In the moment that both straightened up to rest, between sheep, I saw this difference. Her being went on within herself; his stopped, awaiting the next charge of it into activity.

We asked them to come to the porch for a cold drink—one of Cleony's, that were so heavily minted one could not taste what else was in them (she called them her mintmixes). Prue hesitated, but Jed urged: Come on, Prue! With the intonation: Don't make yourself any lonelier than you are, don't make everything harder.

There on the porch Jed took his hat off and leaned against one of the columns, grateful, not for himself so much as for Prue. She kept her hat on, leaning against another post. Father sat on the step looking up at her—which made Janet

yet a little more uncertain as she fluttered about with this wonder visible: Who are these people? Should we be entertaining them? Aren't they just as hired help on the place? Oh, Larry and Julia, always forgetting *differences!* This word was in Janet's bearing, and voice, the more so as Father looked up at Prue, out of all the depths of his single kindness. And Dirk: he held himself away, against the farthest post, uncertain like Janet but not for the same reason, wondering (I could read his very thought from him!): That girl in a man's clothes, what is she afraid of? And, as he remembered what I had said of her, about preventing and preserving: Oh, Julia, with her imagination, this goddess business. She's batty, she's letting her writing mix up with everything.

Jed talked—nervously, to cover Prue's silence. He told of where they lived, a little of Cleony's story of Old Old Hayes, how he had bought the land from his grandfather in the first place. He said it wasn't Old Hayes' fault, about not selling his father more land, about keeping them down there on the river bank; he said his father was more of a river man than a farmer: he owned a ferry and had an interest in a barge and did some freighting. He and Prue were the only farmers of the family, they were the only ones who wanted more land for raising horses. What they might have done with horses! Drake Parker was right about Prue: she was one of the best horsemen in Kentucky. Mind you, not horsewoman but horseman: Prue simply wasn't in the class with any women when it came to handling horses.

But now Prue cried out suddenly: Come on, Jed, we must go!

I looked, and saw the neck scarlet with a flush, and this flush rising. Jed saw too, but did not take the warning. He only rushed on more nervously into speech.

Prue is sensitive, he said, about the way she knows animals like a man. But she is wonderful, she . . .

But now Prue stopped him with: Come on, Jed!

I smiled a little, at the sisterly threat in her voice. All the more when Jed (who might have been Dirk!) made one more effort to ignore it.

If you ride, Miss Julia, he said to me, Prue would like to ride with you. She hasn't anyone but me to ride with. There are no girls hereabouts, and as for men . . . I'd let you have my horse, if you would ride with her.

— Jed!

This time she silenced him. But I caught up his offer, laughing, making light of it: But I'd love to. When shall it be, Prue, this evening?

To my amazement she whipped around where she was and faced me, with the sudden gesture of giving in that she had made in the barn. And, lifting her head, she took her hat off, there, before us all, and showed us the flush, her eyes dark to it, and said: Yes, this evening, make it this evening!

Then she strode away, carrying her hat, the flush now in her forehead.

Janet was first to speak: Well! How dramatic!

And Dirk, mocking: How sisterly that was! How well I can feel for Jed on their way home.

And he mocked past tensions of my own: But, Jed, how could you! Don't you know when to stop telling all you know of me?

Father just sat on, reflective, in a way he had of dwelling in a past moment: She is beautiful!

Janet's quick jealousy and Dirk's resentment were one, answering him. With the figure of a boy—beautiful? With that haircut? and the smell of animals about her? and that exclusive way she has about her? and that morbid secrecy?

Father's simple admiration was quite beyond their attacks: he just repeated the word, sighed, got up and stretched, slouched on his straw hat and went back to his garden. How he infuriated Janet, in leaving her as she was now, unable to do anything about the way he was when he was this way—simple, guileless—absolute, somehow, in himself.

And how I infuriated Dirk, when I walked away from all else he had to say about Prue's unnecessary self-defenses!

* * *

We would ride toward her house, she said—maybe not all the way, but in the direction of the River; she knew short cuts, through the vale, following the creek that fed Zayda's pit.

It was different, riding this road: all things maintained more of a level, there was less low and high on this way to the church. Our horses fell of themselves into an easy canter, given gait by the road—the easy lope of it up and down. Jed had told me that his horse was tolerant of women riders: he modified his spirit and his speed to all women—except Prue, of course: all horses took Prue as a man, he said. Jed's horse was called Lasso, and Prue's, Lariat. Both were safe, he said, too safe to suit Prue, that was why she had bought Hilda.

For a long while Prue was silent as we rode in rhythm together. But at last, fully, it came—all her thinking in this silence.

— What has Zayda told you about me?

— Why, nothing except how well you ride, and do everything that Jed does.

— Nothing else?

— No, truly, Prue, you know how Zayda is—she lets one

learn everything for oneself. Why, she hasn't even told me yet about Drake Parker.

We were descending the last hill, now, to Zayda's churchyard.

— But she has told you about herself?

We were at the pit, ready to turn right sharply, to follow the creek road.

— Yes, but only when I came here with her, and was able to see it all for myself.

— Well, I'm hoping it will be that way with me, that you will see, that you have already guessed . . .

— How lonely, Prue?

— Yes, how lonely, if you mean by that word more than just living off to myself the way I do, down there on the river bank.

— I do mean more than that. Not so much lonely by yourself as in yourself. One part lonely—from the other.

— Do you mean the girl from the boy in me?

— Yes, that is about what I mean, only it isn't so simple as it sounds.

— No, it isn't! Nothing is. Words cover more than they tell, they are like clothes. I get as impatient with them as with skirts. But it is true, and because it is—I'm going to be married next week.

I could only echo that word in the way it came to me, so strange and unconnected.

— You think that odd?

— Odd? Well, only as it is unexpected.

— But that is as good as saying it is odd, or that I am. If you didn't find me so you wouldn't be so surprised, for I'm not that unattractive.

— Hardly!

She shrugged: That is what makes me odd; I'd better be

homely. Then no one would wonder at the way I was; there wouldn't be any wonder . . .

We rode along then in silence for a long while, Prue in retreat from this confidence. Our horses had to walk, for the way was muddy. During the past night a torrential rain had fallen, a whole week's need of it in a few hours. Our road lay low and undrained, and steeply coved on both sides by hills. I suddenly became aware of it, in being thrust from the flow of thought between us by that word married. It was like some impassable barrier in my mind, as it seemed to be in Prue's. There was nothing for either to say beyond it. And it separated me from her: the thrust I felt was like an actual one, out of flow into form. It was as if Being itself, free from forms for a moment, was confined in them again. So all things became vividly objective: hill, twist of road, with the creek shaping it . . .

A happening is a flash, it is a time and a place meeting, it is a crack through concealment. So far as we are not blinded in one way or another in its moment, we can see it: not otherwise, and not afterward. Afterward we think, but we do not see: there is only the moment given. Our questions 'How did it?' and 'How could it?'—they are elaborations made out of a fine lost thread of simple seeing. It is not inner but outer absorptions that blind us. This we have not learned yet; we are sense-beguiled by panorama of the outer eyes, as with the image in a mirror, against that which projects the picture in a million fine star-points of destiny.

I was blind now where Prue saw: blind in the outward observation of mud and hills and swift running water. I was only beginning to think. We must be careful of our horses, when Prue—living within the nature of mud and hill and water—caught her horse's own communication of the danger. For me sound crashed against my inner blindness without intel-

ligence until it was almost over. A whinny from Lariat ahead, an echo from Lasso; then one concerted splash, as of creek tearing loose from its bed; then beat of hoof on rock and a submerged snorting; and then—one wild unbridled cry of horse, not of Lariat and Lasso, but of Horse, all horses in the world. An image accompanied this last sound: of Horse, coming huge beyond all life-size, with sudden closeness, down the creek toward me. Lasso reared to the sight; I fell off, without hurt, but with instinct enough shocked into me to catch at his reins and keep him from running away. Now before me I saw Lariat high in the air on his hind feet, but Prue still in the saddle, bringing him to earth again. But then—in one throw of body—Prue was off, leading Lariat to me, crying: Here, hold him while I . . .

I did not know what she meant to do, or what had happened. I just obeyed, rising and clinging to both frightened horses with my own fright. I only saw after it happened—Prue in the water, struggling; a horse fallen, trying himself to get up but falling again and uttering a cry with the whole world of unutterable animal pain in it—cry against which I had to hold my ears closed, feeling it unbearable. Again and again it came, all the while I saw Prue rising and falling with the horse. Then—nothing seen in all being felt, in suspense, as Prue suddenly raised her arm: nothing more seen in all being singly heard, in one sound—of a shot.

Only all my weight on the bit kept one horse from escaping me. Lariat ran, though Prue's voice was a whip in the air after him: Whoa there, Lariat! Whoa!

I saw then . . . She was standing before me, revolver in hand, smoking. Her clothes lay wet to the fullness of her form, her hat was gone, and her hair was flat on her head. She stood with this flung back, her face broadened to a sudden utter clarity, as if swept clear.

I had to do that, she said. The horse was caught in a wire under the water; you heard that ungodly cry, that meant—complete break, both legs, a horse can't bear that, you know, and no man near him.

Hold on to Lasso, she said, while I go up the hill and tell the man who owns the horse what I've done.

She crossed in front of me and climbed the hill. The way was so soft she could seldom get a foothold, but had to swing mostly upward, from one branch to another. I was thrust outward again into forms and movements. I watched her in each detail of her climb. All the moves of her splendid body gave their shape to her wet clothes. It was like seeing her climb unclothed, in all her beauty.

When she returned, her clarity was gone, both in face and in form; she was filling up again with remembrance, she was stiffening under constraint. And all was in hiding again, under her clothes.

Reckon we'd better turn back, she said. We'll ride a little farther and then turn back—far enough to get the horses past this place, or they'll stop short of it another time.

Lariat had stopped running; he was waiting to be caught, back upon the way we had come.

You lead Lasso past the place, she said. I'll ride Lariat.

And I heard her talk to him: Now, Lariat!

He was balking directly at the place where the horse lay dead in the water. Prue reached above her head for a branch, broke it and laid it across his flank. He went wild to the punishment; he was a horse quiet in himself, going wild suddenly. I thought of Hilda, and closed my eyes. Will it be for her as for—? But I opened them to her riding back to me, white but unshaken, mouth still set to what she had had to do.

On the way back, slowly, Lariat setting the pace, his spirit seeming to be forever broken. . . .

It was hard to hit Lariat, Prue said, but it had to be done. We ride this way often. A horse passing the scene of a former fright will remember; let it be many days, he will remember. Or, if it is not remembering, it is seeing again, as if the scene were taking place where it first happened. Maybe his own fright leaves something in the air that he sees or scents; or it may be for an animal everything is forever in existence, nothing forgotten or remembered—all is wherever it has been, and memory is nothing but a coming upon it again.

Still, she said, it was almost worse than killing that other horse. I have not hit Lariat since I broke him six years ago. Then only once, and I bear a kind of scar inside me for that.

Prue, I asked, what of this gun? How did you happen to have one?

I carry it for protection when I ride at night, she said. I often ride at night.

Then, with a more constrained confidence: I rode all last night.

— All night, Prue?

— Yes. Whenever night gets inside me, I have to ride it through.

I waited long before replying, to let her words speak within what they had not said outwardly. My question was of such information given.

— Was it Drake Parker's night, Prue?

— Yes, but not as his own but as—mine. You'd have to know Drake to understand that, I can't explain it. He just stands for—no, he is—something strong and free and independent that all my life I have struggled to be.

These aren't the right words for it, she cried, interrupting herself with her passion for a stripped accuracy of speech: It is so much more! It is something in Drake and me and all of us that rises above or reaches beyond. Only the lonely come to know what it is, or that it is.

Me! she cried still more passionately: Folks say of me the sort of thing they say of Drake. Of him it is, he is illegitimate—that makes him different. Of me, I'm not a natural girl. They tried to make him what he was supposed to be. He wouldn't let them, he wouldn't even let Old Hayes make him his son. I am myself; I am, I will be, only what is in me to be. This is what Drake Parker has said and been. It isn't just freedom from one thing or another that he has stood for—not just from Old Hayes and his land and his money. No! It is more, I tell you, it is freedom itself, and this is what I . . . Oh, it isn't only where I live that has made me—that has helped to make me lonely, as Jed says; but that is so only because I am lonely in myself, same as Drake is. I was born to such loneliness. I could have gotten *around* it, but that wasn't what I wanted: I want to get *through* it. Same as Drake. He has gone *through* everything in his life, around nothing. And he has come out on—the *other* side. He was proving that there was another side, another way altogether of being when—this happened to him. Now it is as if Life has given its answer to all such effort—to me, through Drake. Oh, but these aren't the words for it. it is so much more.

Prue was almost sobbing.

You'll think it personal, she stumbled on, but it isn't—that is just what it isn't! It is freedom from being this way. And it isn't just an ideal; ideals are lifeless, and this isn't; this is living as nothing else is. I reckon it did start in Old Hayes as everyone says. I don't know for myself; I was a

child when he died, and I haven't any feeling of him but a kind of resentment against all he has forced to be as it is—myself too—making me get born down there in that swamp and spend all my life trying to get through all it has meant to me. If ever I do get through to the other side I suppose I'll be grateful to Old Hayes, same as Drake has lived to be—to bless those that persecute. . . . But I'm not through, and so, like everyone else, I fight Old Hayes in myself, as what I have to get free of.

She had overcome her passion in speaking; she was hardening toward constraint again, and cooling toward her impersonal honesty. We had come in sight of the house; I felt her closing in, against the presence of the others. What she had just said had been keyed out of her by my words 'Drake Parker's night': these had been as magic words to open the door. It was swinging shut of itself; as I had opened it, I must let it close.

Partly to change the subject, but also because I had been thinking of him, I asked now: Prue, tell me, what do you know of Kirtley Hayes?

I had been thinking: What she says of Drake must be what he means!

She had to repeat the name to bring her thought to it. Then she said: But I don't know him very well. I was a small child when he left, and he only comes back for a week or two once a year; and he usually comes in the winter, and no one sees much of him. But I've met him of course. He came once to see a colt I'd bred, and bought her; he paid half again as much as I asked. I didn't want to take it; I thought it was charity or compensation or something—at that time he had a sort of condescending manner about him. But it was only the Hayes manner, as Zayda told me, pride taking the first form it takes before it falls, as all their pride

has had to fall before something far more splendid in Drake. Anyway, the colt was worth it; afterward he made a lot of money out of her as a mare, and he even sent me more. He wrote me a note, saying: 'Maybe this will help you get away from that place where my uncle has stranded you.' But I sent it back. I've told you—I won't go *around* anything.

I had to smile at her so stoutly resisting and protesting.

—Prue, you must be like Drake Parker from all I've heard of him.

With one more flare of her passion, of fire and light through that opened inner door, Prue flashed: Like? If I could be! I have only tried, I am not able, and that is why—Well, I'll tell you what I haven't told anyone, not even Jed. This is why I am marrying. I can't, I can't go through it alone!

We were at the gate.

Oh, Prue, I cried, don't, don't do it for that reason!

It's—it's done, she muttered. It is next week. I've invited the whole countryside, just to show them that I'm not odd—not in the way they think. I'm a regular girl, sweet and natural and girlish . . .

She became vehement again: Listen. I'm turning here, I'm not going back to the house with you. But you, you come on to the wedding with Zayda. Only, don't you dare to bring a cake!

On those words she dug her heels into Lariat, and went galloping past the gate.

I turned into the lane—but stopped. Dirk was here, just to one side, working with Boy on some loose boards of the fence. I stopped and watched them—how determinedly Dirk was working, as if it might have been to our approach; and how Boy was, by this time, fully trusting him, so that he held the nail firmly, no matter how forcefully Dirk's left

hand came toward it. Boy! Who are you, so silent, so dream-enwrapped still that—untrembling, your hand on the nail—with the hammer viciously coming—when from here I can't bear it!

— Dirk! In heaven's name, watch Boy's fingers!

— Oh, mind your own business, Dirk said. Trust goes farther than fear. You still have this sweet spiritual lesson to learn from someone. Zayda, perhaps, the only one who seems to know it.

I dismounted, suddenly tired of saddle and horse—so tired of horse!

Dirk looked up, sensing that tiredness, but mocking its reason.

So, he said, the chaste Diana wore you out, I see.

I was too tired to contend with him.

Save your mockery of her, I said wearily. It will soon be misplaced. Prue Tyler is going to be married next week.

For a moment he was silent, from surprise. But then:

— What am I supposed to do, apologize or something?

— No, just quit wasting energy being so defensive.

— My darling twin, if you for one moment think that I—even in the remotest back of my mind—

— No, my sweet, no! (I was really getting impatient with him.) Not that. It is just your all-inclusive, sweeping defensiveness that I mean. Only I am saying, so far as Prue goes, you need not make the effort. It has lost its point, since this seems to be her lack of femininity.

It isn't her lack of anything, he said edgily, but rather her sufficiency. If only she would lack a little something here and there, one might be able to stand up to her.

— You are still wasting energy in explanation. Use it instead, and ride my horse on in for me, wont you? Jed's coming for it later.

Dirk came to me in the road, Boy following.

— Tired, eh? She did wear you out, then. Who is the man? He will have to be mighty to match her.

— She's not that large and manly. You're adding and subtracting again. But I don't know, she didn't say. I'm going to her wedding; afterward I'll tell you everything, what she had on and how he looked and everything.

Dirk climbed onto the saddle.

Come along, he said to Boy. And he reached with his one arm and caught him up, skillfully and with a certain new affection.

Boy was quickening to glee for the ride. He sat tight to Dirk in front, and grasped at Lasso's mane. Off they went. I watched for a long time. Dirk and this child! Dirk and . . .

* * *

I cannot tell of Prue's wedding in the time-order of its happening: it had all to be known, before any part could be understood: even for Prue the end had to come before she could follow its sequence. I went, and some things I saw for myself, like the cakes. But the sight was not knowledge until afterward; nor was anything that Zayda told me at the time, or that I heard elsewhere. So it is from the end known now, as it was not at the time, that I am telling it.

* * *

Going to Prue's wedding—riding as far as the rocked road went, walking the rest of it—Zayda said: Why on earth Prue wants such a wedding, I can't imagine. It's a fright for any girl to go through, let alone Prue! And she said: There will be upward of three hundred people there, likely, not counting the children, and fifty-odd cakes . . .

She had told me how it was, the custom of the cakes: how

they were voluntary; whoever wanted to, brought one. She was taking three, her own and her mother's and Cleony's.

And, going to the wedding, the question rose between us: Who is this man Prue is marrying? Zayda echoed: Who? No one seems to know anything of him except that he is from off the River, pilot on a freighter. Any beau come to see Prue would have to come by water, she is all-surrounded by it most of the time!

The road we were traveling was her words' explanation! Half of it was rocked—yes, rocked in ledges dropping like those of a creek; the rest was simple mud and—one had the original suspicion of this land—jelly-mud at that. It was still wet from the night's heavy rain, and we had twice to cross a creek running with water. Every sort of pre-motor vehicle was being used by the guests going there—they passed us in a fantastic procession: old surreys and rigs, wagons, a few sleds, and some milk carts. Some were coming on horseback, on work horses and mules. There were half a dozen cars risking it, old T-Fords that had the sound of a threshing machine but the nimble agility of a saddle horse in getting over the rocks.

Zayda said of these pilgrims going so eagerly and against all odds: It is curiosity that is bringing most of them. Folks don't get invited to the Tylers' often; they live on roads inside themselves that are as hard to get over as these. You'll see how it is: Prue's mother is as vague as they make women, she's hazy! And her father is more than half River man; he drifts in his mind, he's got no pull or climb in him. Jed doesn't care about anything except breeding animals; he has all but lost his human nature to it. So it isn't just Old Hayes keeping them there—no! Old Hayes just stands in their life as he does in every other—for what they are themselves; he just seems to make them be it, that is all.

So Zayda, as, crossing and recrossing the road for the harder side of it, we went walking—carefully carrying the cakes, boxed and marked ‘Top’ and ‘This Side Up.’

Not only the guests were wondering, Why so large a wedding? and Who *is* the man? Down at Prue’s house, her father was fooling around in the barn and asking himself Why?—when she has always lived so closely to herself? And Who?—this man from the River, when Prue herself is not of the River but of the Land? And he thought about Prue: She is not even half-river like myself, she is all of the land; why, she might better have been Old Hayes’ daughter than mine, there is no drift whatever in her, it is all striving. He thought of Old Hayes: Strange, about him, how he seems to get himself mixed up with everyone in this place. But it was only a drifting thought: he could not think hard about anything, not with the River out there, just below the barn, sliding by so easily, taking his thought with it. He went back to Prue: If she had the River in her, like me, it would be different—she’d like living on a boat, just going up and down, never across to anywhere . . . But he gave this thought up because she was not like him, in any way; and he sighed, and just went back to wondering, Who? and Why?

And Prue’s mother, inside the house, fretfully working at all she had to do: Why did Prue have to, when she has always avoided people so? Not that she herself minded, except for all the work; she would like to have company for a change, folks came in so seldom. The wedding part was all right, or would have been, if Prue had only stayed home to help with the work. But what did she want to get married for? What difference would it make to her, with her so self-willed and set, except—up there in her room, her bed, now and again . . . How *could* Prue—this man who was all but a

stranger! Still, even if she had known him longer, would it have been any different? Wasn't it always this way with a wedding: come the day of any woman's wedding, didn't she and her folks always have to wonder, *Who is this man?* She could remember how it had been for herself, even though she had known Prue's father almost all her life: how, on her wedding day, even she had wondered: *Who is this man I am taking unto myself as myself?* Well! It would not last; soon all would be as familiar as it was strange for a moment; and it would be as dull as it had been exciting; and as certain as—uncertain. Day after day, always the same, except for the River flowing. Prue might wake up tomorrow frightened, and asking: *Who is this man?* But after a few mornings the River would take into itself somehow all that was uneasy. Ah, the River!—flowing outside her window, either here at home or on a boat, whichever place she decided to live: the River would somehow take into itself, all, for Prue, as it had for herself . . .

Now Prue's mother, looking up to the road for the first time, saw the people coming, and worry claimed her from that dream of River into which she so easily slipped: into being carried out of herself—nowhere. If only Prue had taken some of the work upon herself! But here she was, out riding, and all the leaves still to be put in the table, and the bird-dirt to be washed off the benches outside. Oh, well, folks wouldn't be inside much, nor sitting down anywhere; they would be walking around to see all they could see—they got down here so seldom. They'd go look at the River; it was a sight from the lawn, all silver and shining, polished up brighter than anything in the house ever could be. They would have to admit: Well, anyway, Miss Rena has had a pretty place to live in all these years.

But to the leaves of the table, since the cakes were beginning to come! She'd have to have help. Where *was* Jed? Oh, Je-e-ed-d-d!

And now Jed: as far off as he could get from the house, farther even than the barn. Why, why, why all this fuss, when she might have just ridden? If only this fellow had been a land man, one who might have ridden off with Prue to get married, who didn't have to come sneaking up at the back door on a boat! If only he, Jed, might have seen Prue riding off in her breeches to be married, it would have been different, more of a—a mating; he could have understood and taken some pride in it and some—pleasure—feeling it strong and natural and like Prue. But this man! Who was he anyway? Sometimes he could hardly remember his name. He with his cocked hat, and his strut and his wasted strength of limb and of shoulder, on the River!

Darn, there is Mother calling! I'll be hanged if I'll go in! I'll ride—that is what I will do; I'll ride the darn thing out of me. But what is the use, when Prue isn't with me, when never she will be again! Oh, all right, Mother, I'm coming . . . But, Prue, why, why, why are you doing this? It all has been enough for me—why hasn't it been so for you?

And Prue. Riding. Still at noon; since early in the morning . . .

She was living it all over again, not only this past year, but time before that. She was going back to when it was all enough for her, just to be like Jed and a little better. While she was growing up it was all right: she had no separate knowing or being. It was only when the growing stopped and the thing was done, the body resting: within this rest, then, another activity had begun to stir, this one of Prue herself, this one of individuality emerging. Small-cored within the large outer growth, it had come into existence; and in this

hour her loneliness had begun. Only a year ago, however, it had fully declared itself. She went back to time, about a year ago, one morning in August . . . More vividly now than at its time, she lived this day over.

It was the time of fogs on the River, of muggy heat in the valley. She wakened early from a restless night of retrospection—of herself as she had grown to be; of her man's strength and its clothes that she wore; of her want of girls for friends, and of men for lovers; of her want of all companionship except that of Jed and her horse. Jed was so much like herself there was only her horse for difference. And this? This brought her to her love for a horse, her passion for riding that was—passion, a kind of ecstasy she took in movement, in freedom, in riding free—she did not know from what or to what: it seemed to be just riding free!

All through this night, warmly washing over her, as love might wash warmly over another girl, she had known this ecstasy of riding: in wind and sun, in pulse and quiver and twitch of horse, in all his sensitivity. Her horse was a connection out of her personal loneliness into a whole world awaiting communication. In riding she seemed to tear through space, not mechanically but with a living penetration: almost she could see, riding, what the horse saw; all sensitivity in her was loosened, it seemed, and was extended forward, as in her horse—in the long forward reach of his head, and of his feet outstretching it. It was a mystery of release for her, this loosening; but she did not question it—the experience carried its own verity: it was, as nothing else had ever been, experience. All other feeling beside it, or thought of feeling, was faint and shadowy: only this, riding—movement abstracted from all form and weight, in air and sun or rain—only this reached that inner core of herself and stirred it into a sense of being alive in a world living. All the rest was

a kind of dead, still weight: words were this, that she had to say to others—those small weakened words that she had to use with her mother, or those vague evasive ones with her father, or those self-hiding words with Jed. As for those with others, the few of their neighbors that she knew, they were as little lifeless pebbles in her mouth, saying them. Silence was infinitely more alive: silence even of thought, when riding.

All this she had realized as never before on this morning in August, waking early from a night restless of such realization. It was very early; no one was up yet, not even Jed. She woke to heat that was like thought in her mind and blood in her veins, both closing in upon her closely. She sprang from her bed as if to leave her thought in it, and start her blood flowing. She drew on breeches and boots; tucked in a white shirt, leaving the collar deeply open; ran a wet comb through her short hair, splashed color with cold water into her face; and jammed down a big straw hat to her brows. She thought simply now of riding: out of the hot valley and fog to the high plateau above, where the air would be clearer and fresher. With stealth she went out of the house, that Jed might not hear her. She wanted to ride alone, as herself, that inner self, of which Jed knew nothing: which had nothing to do with Jed, or anyone else saving perhaps Drake Parker, but not Drake, as himself. . . .

Instantly, outside, she became aware of a kind of dislocation in the place, like that which happened in time of flood, when buildings changed places, or new ones altogether appeared, washed in by the River; when fences went down, and all familiar boundaries were lost to water or mud. Ordinarily the house yard was a cleared handkerchief square outlined by a picket fence at the height of the willows' tops, on the lower shore of the River. Now this square was

broken!—not by any form she could immediately make out, but by a kind of bulk of fog, all piled up in one corner. Without actually seeing, she was able to guess from the past what had happened: a boat of some kind had run aground in the fog. She went to see. But before seeing anything she heard—a string of vituperation done in the grand style of the River's own fluency, addressed to the Fog. She knew then that a boat had been grounded; and that its captain or pilot was trying to blast it out of the mud by the power of utterance.

She was drawn by the vigor alone of the speech to where it hung in the hill. Close upon it she could only make out a gangplank, and on this a man standing, greeting the dawn with anathema. Only with this did he greet her, too.

Hey there, buddy, he called, where in the hell are we, and is there any way you might lift that goddamned plank out of the mud while I pull on it?

His request was a challenge to her, to keep her girl's identity secret, and to try to do what he asked. Where a cast might come into another girl's looks for coquetry, strength flowed into her muscles for its exhibition. With this in her voice she called back to him: I'll try to lift it if you pull at the same time. Then she tried, with her hands, but could not.

Another string of oaths came through the veiled air to her. At the same time the form of the man came closer. She could make out that he was very large, and was taking the stand of an admiral before her, legs far apart, as if riding the waves of a sea. She sensed that he was young, for a kind of freshness came from him and from all the vigor of his speech.

She pulled her hat lower to her eyes and stood also with feet apart, the more to appear as a boy before him. Holding her voice to its deepest tone, she called to him, to prevent

him from coming closer: Wait a minute. Try again with the rope while I put my hip to the plank.

Hip? he called back. What the hell? How much of a hip have you that you can lift with it?

It is fair-sized, she shouted back with a smile in her voice, for as young as I am.

So a kid, are you? he asked. Well, if that's the case, better call your dad. This is a man's job.

You just wait, she said, and bent her body to the plank. She was determined now to lift that plank: strength came to her will, as in riding. She could not keep thrill of it from her voice as she cried again: You just wait!

The man, being puzzled, ejaculated again: What the hell? But at the same time he agreed: All right, sonny, try your hip at it, and more power to you. Ready? One, two, three!

Prue swung herself sidewise, got under the end of the plank that had rammed into the cliffed clay of the bank, and heaved. And in the moment she was suffused with that peculiar muscular joy she knew, that triumph of coordination. It was not limited to herself, but ran outward from her and was picked up and completed by the arm of the man pulling the rope. She knew it, so running; for in this way the energy of gesture ran from her into her horse. She knew herself in the same way completed. No deed could fail to be done with two strengths matched as hers and the man's were, in the moment; or as hers and her horse's, when perfectly they went together.

Good work! the man shouted. She's free of the hill. And he came striding toward her, displacing the thinning fog with the bulk of his large body. She could even now make out some of his features. Young, yes, and jaunty—with the look of a riverman, wearing the cap of pilot or captain—

pilot, likely; he was young for a captain, and anyway had the swagger of one who has not quite arrived. Come on board, he said as he came, and get a nip of something for your trouble.

Before the next step of the adventure she hesitated. Shyness had already set in, and the nervous reaction of the girl. The throb of itself would come into her voice, she would not be able for long to hold the disguise, even if the man were not to see her distinctly. And when he found out— She challenged herself: Well, what of it? She had always to challenge sensitivity with reason when someone discovered her girlhood and its beauty. Down at the agricultural college where she had gone with Jed, she had had to reason with herself in this way before every appearance in the classroom in skirts; or whenever Jed would make any point of introducing her as his *sister*. Into all discovery she goaded herself with the words: Well, what of it? They had become like something she straddled and rode into action.

So now . . . She pulled her hat farther down to her eyes, and cried on the spur of it: I don't care if I do! And she jumped onto the plank.

He was quite close now, and he looked closely; but the fog was thick enough to keep him from seeing. If she did not have to speak, or if he did not have the sensibility that some men seemed to have of what was hidden in her . . .

What'll it be? he asked. Whiskey straight?

It was not only that she had to say: Make it a ginger ale. Not just the words or her voice. It was—the man, as she had feared, with his instinct for woman. He came closer as he spoke, and caught her arm before she could escape. With his suspicion in his voice he demanded: What is your name? At the same time his hand deepened to her arm's softness.

Out it came from her, riding that challenge that as never before rang through her: Well, what of it?

Prudence, she answered.

* * *

This was her memory, riding, of that morning almost a year ago, that seemed but yesterday to the one that had come—with only one day and one night between them. And now another followed—of the year that, as a day, had followed it.

He was saying: You're a new kind of a woman to handle, but if there is a man to do it, I can! He had said this shortly, after stopping a few more times, unexpectedly, finding her somewhere on the place, working. And shortly, only after a month or so, he had tried to make love to her. Tried to kiss . . . By God, you are a new kind of a woman, but I'm equal to you if any man is! He was able, for he was the stronger, not of will but of bodily strength. She had known that first challenge again, of matching strength to his: as joy it had run through her. He had mistaken this joy, with that mistaking typical of him! Of being himself its cause: he, attributing all to himself, all, in that cock-vanity of his! She had resisted, but he had kissed her; and with that kiss he had weakened her—only in the smallest of small woman-weakenings, only for a moment of fatigue in herself, from her own efforts . . . Still he had felt that little he had gained over her and had grown in confidence of it, and in cocksureness.

He stopped again and again: somehow he always found her, wherever she was. And he would always take her by surprise. She might be bending over some work on the ground; suddenly, all blood to her head, looking up between her booted legs, she would see him there. If only she had not been challenged by him! But there was something in

him or about him that struck deep, deep beyond any understanding of it, into that very core of herself, stirring it to action, not setting it free but stirring it to some assertion of freedom. And it was this assertion that she could not keep from making before him. Yet it was just this that inflamed him so, that created his very passion for overcoming her! If only she could have felt him like the others, not deeply, not actively: could have spoken faint or feeble words, not words of truth and strength! But always he evoked words and looks from her that were to him his passion's provocation. How was this? She could not understand: how she despised him and yet created in both herself and him something positive as love was. In her it was not love, not love ever! But it was creative: of some sort of vitality, some new enhanced being. And in him it was something he took for love, never having known this, being incapable of knowing it. What her hate and contempt for him should have destroyed, it created. How was this? She could not understand, she could only cry in defense of it all: Leave me alone, leave me alone! She meant: alone in the inner selfhood upon which he was intruding with his words, his gestures, his threats.

Still he kept coming, always taking her by surprise. She began to think of leaving home entirely; but she could not quite admit to herself or him so much defeat. Then one night he came—very late. She had not heard his boat—he had landed it well away from their place, down the River. She was down on the bank, looking for an axe her father had left there. It was dusk. He had been waiting. It was all sudden. If she had already found that axe! But she had only just seen it, she was bending to pick it . . . He all but leaped out upon her, pulling her up, backwards toward him.

What's to be the end of this? he said. I can't go on for-

ever this way: it is hurting my business; I'm running late on my schedules, waiting around for you this way.

Struggling, but uselessly, for he held her so strongly: I've never asked you to stop!

— Asked? My God, everything about you cries out, makes me; I can't pass this damnable spot any more without stopping!

— But it isn't I crying out, but something in yourself . . .

— What is in me is in you, my girl. You can't put it all on me.

— But it is not what you think!

— Oh, isn't it? Then what is it, what else can it be? I'm man, you're woman under those clothes you wear, what else?

And he kissed her, with only this being, man; with no imagination of any other being, no intimation, no margin of any freedom in him, no detachment: wholly given to his act, lost in it—he! While she—confused, hotly so, with blood confusion; and yet at the same time free from this confusion, or struggling to go free, his very act engendering the struggle in her.

But he—lost, and the stronger—prevailed. His hands fell upon her clothes that infuriated him, tearing them from her. But when these hands, under the clothes, found her woman—and not just woman to man, but Woman as he had not dreamed her to be, strong and deep and tender: then passion in them hovered between love and lust. Lust won, because he desired it all for himself, because of selfish desiring. In him, as in herself for one moment, love flashed its full penetrating stroke, of light and power; but where it brought its own revelation to her, it blinded and stunned him. What he did was blind, it was dark and dumb and all unseeing with blindness. It had no power, only force. Power she might have

dealt with, power of will or desire; but not force that was senseless itself and producing senselessness. She went down under what was dumb and stupid and dark, spreading from him to herself: was just force used and felt and exhausted in both.

Afterward he said wearily: Now you will have to marry me. Not with the triumph he had anticipated, but wearily. She wondered that he said it at all. Perhaps he wondered himself. He kept saying: What is there about you still to hold me? She said at first: You need not come again! He answered: I cannot stop even at this. By God, what is there about you? But only at first was she strong enough to say, You need not come. Afterward she was not so sure of herself, when she looked into this self and saw—how his hands in falling upon her had stricken the two parts of her further asunder. What the hands of love might have combined, the hands of lust had divided; and from this division was born the weakness and fear that brought her at last to say: Now I will have to marry you.

* * *

So had this morning come, day of her wedding, of that ceremony of her fear. She recalled now, as she rode, how she had awakened to this day. She had reached out for breeches and shirt on the chair, forgetting for a moment what day it was. Her hands had struck something else—a pile of frothy stuff, white in the dusk, and a little sticky in her hot hand. She had recoiled from it and shut her eyes to the white, for it was the token of a dream that had passed through body and mind in the night. Bride! Petticoats, lace at the breast, veil over the face to hide knowledge of . . . Bride! She had closed her eyes tightly to the color and the fabric that were that identity. Bride!

And she recalled how, when she had gone downstairs, she had seen her mother icing the wedding cake, tallest and whitest and stickiest of all cakes to come. This was the symbol of the dream she had had: of wedding cakes brought by all those invited: cakes which the people coming wore on their heads as hats. As they bent their heads to whisper—Hum-m-m, wonder if . . . wonder who . . . and how long? . . . and if?—these toppled over and fell from their towers until there was a thickness of sweet white frosting everywhere. When she had run from the house she had been fleeing that frosting. And now as she rode she was still fleeing it: one white froth of lace and net, ribbons and flowers and frosting.

Bride!

Why do I not ride on and never turn back? she wondered, now that once more she was riding, knees to the flesh of a horse, knowing it through leather; hand to his guidance by pain or ease at the bit; smell of his heat and his sweat in her nostrils: whip of his mane across her breast when she leaned to the gallop. And through horse: feel of morning, of space rent to its inner nature as Time, eternal in its recurrence, movement to music of which the rhythm was fall of hoof, beat of her heart beating; break of wind into sound to his running; break of sound back into silence of sun shining; but pulse in that silence, pulse of warmth, quivers of this coming in waves. But what are waves save as they, too, are rhythms, movement of Time in Space?

And I part of all this, this whole connected thing, this Universe! I—part as one beat is part of the one that follows it. I have this and I have given this up!—all for a small personal security, for one passing moment of my life, in one dot of a place on all the earth! Why do I not ride on, and never turn back? Why, Lariat, why?

Her answer came, not from herself, but from another.

Because of—because you are no longer alone to ride so; because wherever you might go I would go with you! It was—voice of the child, the first voice of its speaking in any thought or feeling to her. Because his hand falling upon you did divide, and one of the divided parts is myself, his hand creating when it should have destroyed!

She had another thought for an instant, hearing this voice. But it answered also this thought: Neither could you die alone, it would not only be your death but mine.

Backward then she turned, though she rode slowly, slowly—Lariat himself going slowly, as if he knew: last ride—last ride—it is as one going to a funeral!

* * *

Two rigs were already in the yard. Prue stole into the kitchen the back way.

Goodness! her mother said, catching her as she tried to make the back stairs unseen: Goodness, how late you are! Now you'll have to take your bath upstairs, you can't do it in the summerhouse.

But she was diverted from her scolding by the cakes.

— Prue, do come and see the cakes just for a moment. Ten have come already, and they are only beginning. You'll have as many as ever a girl had. Fifty, they say, are coming!

And her mother went to the kitchen table and lifted a cloth. There, as in the dream: white and sticky towers. Standing where she was, hot from her ride, a little dazed by the stillness of standing after so much motion, she saw them all totter as in the dream, nodding from people's heads, bending to look slyly and to whisper: M'm-m! Wonder if . . . so, so, so . . . Each cake so much thought of her, as it was getting itself made, whipped up with thought, fifty women at it, then all smoothed over with icing, covering over

all curiosity and memory and vicarious anticipation . . .

Prue cried: Cover those damned things over. I don't want to see them!

Her mother in surprise dropped the cloth on them, without draping it over the assortment of candlesticks she had assembled to hold it off the icing.

Well, for the land's sake! she said. You must be nervous. Go on upstairs and get undressed. I'll bring the hot water.

* * *

Two o'clock. She was ready. Her mother came to see; but she was not herself, but some strange artificial person she became under the pressure of all the company below—the greetings, the repetitions.

She spoke in a flat, hurried way: You look just lovely. But then she added with a flare of her one rapture in the occasion: Do go down the back way and look at the cakes. There are fifty, and they are the finest-looking lot of wedding cakes I have ever seen. Come on down, and begin thanking people.

She went herself, the cakes on her mind, only the cakes, not Prue, not the hour that had come . . .

Prue lingered, feeling herself warm and red to the cool white of her undergarments and her dress, with a resentment of those cakes. How could she have wished them on herself, and this silly dress—that was too sheer for her size, with the underwear showing through that was—her mother's consciousness of her as a bride, not her own. . . . Her mother would already have told the women downstairs: I made it all myself by hand. And they would peep through the organdie of the dress to see. And maybe to see besides—yes, the breasts full, the waist shapely . . . If only her mother hadn't babbled: I stitched it all by hand!—so that they would look closely enough, as if to see the stitches . . .

But what can it uncover, she thought of the dress, except my girlhood? And it is to prove this that I am having this wedding.

But she stood on, stricken with a deeper worry: Must they not see, when I stand beside him and he says, I do take thee, that he has taken . . . Will they not be able to see the body trembling to the touch remembered? Or, if they should not see, will they not hear it in his voice, I take—I have already taken—I—I—I! That strong, masculine, strutting, vain and stupid I of his!

Pru-dence! her mother called from the foot of the back steps, You'll only have time to see the cakes before he comes. I hear his boat around the bend.

At the same time she too heard the boat.

But she did not go to see the cakes. She went, instead, down the front stairs. The house was empty of its guests. They, too, hearing the boat, crowded there on the lawn to see—to behold the bridegroom! Prue stood on the stairs, watching through the door. It was his boat—she saw the name; but it was attached to its barges, and he had said he would come without them and they would go afterward on a pleasure trip. And—it was blowing, but not for a landing—only for the right of way past another boat coming down. She looked and looked, and saw—what no one else . . . She looked through space and time and saw him there at the pilot wheel, passing the hour appointed, passing in clear weather where fog had driven him . . .

* * *

Her mother was there at the foot of the steps, mouth agape, looking out the open front door: But—but he has gone by, he has gone by! Somebody go after him!

She went fluttering to the door as if to send someone on

the lawn after the boat. But Prue, leaping the rest of the steps, caught her in time.

You fool! she blazed. Would you have them know the truth of it? Don't you see? They can still think it has been some accident, they don't need to know that was his boat. Go and tell them it wasn't; tell them there is time yet, there are often delays on the River. We've got to wait, all afternoon, wait—do you hear?—so they'll get all worked up thinking something has happened . . .

She pushed her mother through the door.

— Go say it was a false alarm, that wasn't his boat.

For herself she went back upstairs, to do her waiting there.

* * *

She had this to say for her mother: she was going through it well enough. With a round red spot on each cheek, an overbrightness in her eyes, talking too much but—well enough. As for her father, he had not changed; it would take more than this to change him. And Jed? But Jed had refused to be present at the wedding; he had been gone since noon.

It was her father who carried it the best, accepting the lie as the truth: He is just late, something is always coming up on the River. Her father was enjoying this seldom visit of his neighbors: It is right good for you all to come this long way even to a wedding. Might as well stay the day, now you're here. Takes a wedding or a funeral to get you down this far . . .

Wedding or funeral, wedding or funeral: the words rang in her ears senselessly until her mother called her from them: Pru-dence! Come on down and cut the cakes. Might as well have a taste of them while we wait. Come on down. We'll do this wedding hind side before.

Prue went to the call. I'll do this, she thought, if it kills me.

And she did it, she served the cake and the ice cream with jests: Which do you want, light or dark, or both? . . . This is Zayda's. . . . Mamma, whose cake is this with the lemon cream filling? . . . That is Miss Ora's—better have all three. . . . Shame you didn't get to see me married, but, as Mamma says, better miss that than the cakes. . . . I swear I don't know whose this is; you see I don't know you people by your cakes. (I don't know you, I don't know you, nor you me, nor ever you me!) Mamma, whose with the raspberry jam? I was about to give Miss Lottie some of her own. . . . Light or dark, light or dark or both?

* * *

Upstairs in her room again, the clothes stripped from her, stripped—as you would knock icing off a cake if it were too sweet for you . . . If he should come later she would have no dress to wear, she would have to go through it in her riding clothes. On the bed for a moment, face down, body almost naked in the hot room with the hotness inside, a flush waving over her, and, within, the daze that comes from the blood warm and its flow fast. On the bed in her satin slip, but even this much of the white and the smoothness unbearable. Rising, she tears it, too, from her, and reaches in the dusk for the feel of her riding clothes. They are there, as she took them off; she has not had time to tidy her room. Now, sitting on the bed, she clutches at them as if they were some palpable form of herself that she had lost sense of, that alone was left to cling to as familiar, out of all that is strange—her half-clothed form sitting here . . . Lace at the breast! It is to cover this strangeness that she begins to put

the clothes on: to get rid of the soft and the smooth feel of fabric to skin and skin to fabric: to know the rough and the stiff and the unyielding again. She dresses fully, sitting here, though it is hot and hotter: she draws her boots on and buckles them shut. Not to restore, with no hope for restoring: I can never be the same again! Just to cover up, to get rid of that feel of satin and of icing. . . .

Stupidly, for a long while she just sits here, as if there were no place left in her mind but this room. Outside is all River, a flow of feeling and thought past her. But as it becomes warmer and warmer, and her clothes lie more heavily upon her, she rises for sheer relief from the discomfort—just for air to breathe—before shutting herself back into this room forever. But, outside, it is not quite all River; before her lies a sight familiar: she sees the trodden path to the barn that runs with the easy rambling shift of her father's gait; and beyond it the enclosed lot where the cows come to stand for milking. They are there now, and her father is milking—outdoors because it is so warm.

And, beyond, there is the pond, and in it a cow is standing ankle-high in the water, drinking, as if to refill herself after being milked. The pond lies round to the shape of the sun sinking into it, taking on its color. Evening! And the place as it has always been, always! Her father milking as usual—dear God, as usual!—in this quiet hour, as if its time were no different. As she listens into the silence of the evening she can hear the stream of milk hitting the pail. This sound! Spray of milk to a bucket for the nourishment of life; flow of milk through ages, from udder and—breast. Her hands cover her own to the sense—of milk flowing. Weight of milk! The way cows walk at evening, or before calving. Weight of life! Weight of it coming in my hand this moment. I and the cow, mammals! Oh, but no, no, no, I am not like this!

It is not true, it is only the way I'm caught, like a cow; it is a process, something running in a vein that has nothing to do with me!

She leaps to her feet at the thought, out of its crushing weight, and the intricate weblike sense of vein and process. She flees the room that she had thought was her safety, going down the back stairs. At the door to the kitchen she pauses a moment, remembering her mother. I cannot bear to see her now, as another woman. Nor the cakes! She plunges past the door—safely. Her mother is there, but bending over the cakes, tasting crumbs, nibbling. M'm-m, Miss Lottie's, but I can't see that it is richer than any other jam cake. Yet it is better to find her mother this way; she is able to pass without being heard. She runs on, tiptoeing—not noiselessly, because her boots are heavy; but her mother does not hear. She goes out the door at the end of the hall; she is outside now, safely outside in that silence . . .

Evening! As it has been evening in all the time she can remember. No sound save of the River's whisper here and there to the shore in passing it, and of the milk in the pail, more muffled now as the pail is filled . . . Is she hearing it at all? or just imagining? or hearing it from somewhere in herself—where, if she lives forever, she will hear it?

But, far from finding the silence a comfort, she knows it as torture. Now to the sound, the sight closer upon her is added: of cows, milk flowing, sun going down, River. Again she is seized and driven to flight.

Unseen, she has arrived at the horses' side of the barn: she finds herself here, inside, leaning hot and breathless and still dazed against the closed gate. Here she cannot see River or hear Milk; here she is safe, safe against that sight and sound. Here with Lariat! For now he is nickering that little intimate, just-between-us, just-between-horse-and-man nicker.

And now, too, the smell of horse is displacing all other sensibility. The sweat-smell of him, and the smell of manure steaming-hot and fresh. And smell of saddle and saddle blanket, still wet from the morning ride. The morning? and the ride? The smell is bringing this back to her—not as memory but as another flux of thought that begins to course through her. But this is still more unbearable!—that knowledge returning of her morning ride; that experience relived, ending in the words: Now I will have to marry you. But now?—that time has passed, and that much protection in the word marry.

Standing here, she begins to come clear and too clear of her daze. Time swings back into a consecutive flow, time past and time to come. And looking either way she cannot face it. She has no mere dream now of people's faces and thoughts and tongues; no mere murmuring of what they had to say comes to her, no *m'm-m's* and *ah's* and *wonder if's*. Now definite things that they know and say, with full knowledge, and outright, declare themselves. And not just tomorrow and the day after, but through years.

It is time, too much of it: the one moment growing to a life, and the one act. And not only to her own life, but that of another—of the child. It is too much, all at once, as it is coming—all at once. It is unbearable! Suddenly so. She moves from where she stands as if she can no longer bear it, standing; and leans against Lariat and says simply to him: Lariat, I can't bear this. You understand? I can't bear it! And she leans, with all she cannot bear, against him.

He does understand; he nickers and pulls at the halter. Before this, she has ridden off things she could not bear. Well then, let us be off, us two: we've ridden things off before. She smiles faintly, in the far-off time of yesterday, at his response. But as she begins to saddle him all becomes

more immediate: something new flows into the stream of the old and habitual. She is secretive of this; for, in the moment, it is secretive from her.

She mounts him, riding out of the barn, ducking for the door, and takes him as usual to the pond for a drink before starting out. She lets him drink leisurely and long, and then gives him rein to go where he will. He starts off on an easy canter around the pond, as they often do at evening, just to get into their stride. Round and round, faster and faster, but only to work up speed, not yet really striking it. They break the stillness of the June evening into wind blowing. They disturb a cow in a cow's peace, standing in the pool, so that she leaves, running, shattering the mirror of the pond for the sun's reflection. They stir quail from the tall grasses, giving sudden rise to them from the secret places of their nesting. Let them take fright: let them know with her knowledge—there is no place left, there is no hiding. This is her new knowledge and decision. It is beginning to make itself known to her, though still she is secretive of it from Lariat. She lets him think, Fun as usual. A splash through the pond, not—defiance of the very sun. Let me break up your image too, of peace and light as life given to man! Round and round she goes, trying to break the very circle of pond and sun, circle of these as one of life—trying in herself to break some life circle . . .

But now Lariat, tiring of the play around the pond, leaves it suddenly and goes galloping off to the road, leaping the gully. Almost he unseats her, he takes it so unexpectedly. But everything begins to happen only to the end forming in her. Lariat's sudden speed. He might well outrun Hilda, the way he is going now! Hilda—horse—Drake's destiny—as it might be mine. Well, there is some sense to this. It should be this way, there is rightness in death coming the only

way life has come. It is ironic, but it gleams with truth.

They have come to the creek road now, the short cut from Hayes El Pike to the River Road, cross country, through the hills. Lariat turns of himself. She does not ride it often at night: it is too rough. But since Lariat has turned, with his own intention—no place better, no road with such hazard of rock and hole. And now with night coming on, the sun wholly down—I have myself driven it off with the cow—something else happens under her. The girth slips. I must not have tightened it, I was so weak in that moment; or did I do this purposely? It is coming unbuckled; this will annoy Lariat. Well, but a girth, I might ride without that, I might just let saddle slip and ride on . . . But on the other hand I can go with it, as any rider would; it would look quite unavoidable, girth broken, horse at this speed—no one but Jed would know . . . And now, with another danger! That place of Lariat's fright reached! Did it not happen to this end? Before me the decision was made, and outside me—by life. For me as for Drake! For what reason but this had those horses come splashing into the creek? Yes! It is life that has given this answer. And if this is life's answer to me, must it not be mine—to life?

She digs her heels into Lariat, crying: Faster, faster!

But now the place is coming, into Lariat's sight or scent, his memory or immediate knowing—that place! And he is running, at a headlong pitch into dark space, with rocks and holes under him, water roaring in the creek close by, culvert bridges uneven. With her sense of danger comes another—that ecstasy of riding. Of horse to her knees clinching it, her body in balance to its movement; of air rent, disclosing some inwardness to her sense of it, some vibrant inwardness that is not dark with the night but is bright-particled as with little stars into which the penetration of her riding breaks it.

And of all embodiment giving way like this, as if it were no more than air rent: of the hills parting to let her through and into themselves, into all their inward living potency that has brought so much to be—the great forests, the acres of living grasses. And of a road falling away under her horse's feet, a road traveled, taken of all its difficulties, its grades and stones and all unevenness. And of herself poised in all this movement and penetration, capable of holding against it.

But this is living, I am alive, I am no different, this is not different! Still I can know this somewhere in myself where nothing and no one can reach! This is life that has nothing to do with what has happened to me or can happen. They with their cakes and their whispers!—they know nothing of this or of me knowing it. This is life, this is my living! And I was ready to give it up—this—that is Drake Parker's own knowledge, that must be his even now as he lies half-conscious, that death has not overcome, nor ever will. Drake, Drake, it is as if you were calling to me out of your own darkness: This is it, Prue, this still is it for us both, in the very earth and air for our knowing. This can't happen to you. Ride, Prue, ride!

She calls then to Lariat, to slow him to the danger: Whoa, Lariat, whoa! But it is too late! Now his speed—it is not his own—as he comes to the place, remembers, or recognizes . . . Lariat, beyond himself, is running away! And now, though she is willing to ride, trying to ride, though she is . . . or tries to be . . . best horseman . . . in all the world . . .

Too late. No one with girth gone and at this speed, and hole and rock and horse remembering . . .

Flung over Lariat's head, his foot striking her, she cries to God as her witness: But I chose life, I chose it!

All this time, back at Hayes El: sight of the cakes was in my mind, too, and of all the people. And sound of that boat passing. I knew as the others did not; Zayda and I knew it together—we had read it from Prue as she passed the cakes. She had not offered us any; but we could not have taken any if she had. Zayda and I had fled sight of Prue, passing the cakes.

And now, the night come—I could not sleep, or even stay in the house, but had to walk outside, up and down the lane, to the road—listening. I could only dumbly hope and pray that Prue would be riding. Yes, it must be so; only so would she be able to bear it. Somewhere, in this very moment she must be riding. And might it not be toward Hayes El for the small comfort of understanding that I might be able to give her? Oh, yes, Prue, yes, let it be to Hayes El!

I went once more down the lane to the highroad to listen, almost putting my ear to the ground to get some sound of her riding. And I kept calling to her: Prue, Prue, this way! And I tried to trace her coming, going before her to lead her safely on the way. Slowly now, up the creek road, slowly past that place where the horses came. You will be able to pass it safely, you must be! What did Drake call you—one of the best horsemen? It will be all right for you, Prue, only not too fast. Once past this place it will be all right, you will be safe, you shall have ridden to safety!

There was no sound for what seemed to be hours of this crying in myself. But suddenly, on a trip that I thought must be my last to the road, I heard—horse's feet coming, and fast, all four falling as one with speed! And now, in another moment, Lariat himself!—but—riderless! He turned in to the lane almost overrunning me, no saddle and no

rider, and he exhausted—seeking the grass, not to graze but to fall and roll . . .

* * *

I called Father somehow. Janet had gone to bed, but not he. I got him downstairs, without waking Janet. For still I was conscious of what I must hide for Prue. I told him—just enough. Yes, he said, if she has been thrown it will be there. And he rode off on Hilda, at Hilda's uttermost speed.

At the end of the lane I waited, all voice mute in me now. In time only to be measured afterward, in less than an hour of it, he returned. From the way he came, slowly, holding Hilda in to her smoothest, gentlest running walk, I felt that he was bringing her. But living? or dead? or how badly injured? And, yes, he had her in the saddle in front of him: now I could see them, in the light of a late moon rising. She was riding slumped forward, her feet in the stirrups, while he rode without any.

I ran out onto the pike, my question unspoken. But Father knew it. He spoke my answer, in speaking to her:

— Just a little longer, Prue. Can you hold out?

I did not wait for them, but ran back to the house to get help from Dirk for carrying her. Now that I knew she was living I could find a few words for my prayer: Let it not be badly, not so badly hurt as Drake!

I wakened Dirk, crying: It is Prue, she has been thrown from her horse. Come help Father with her.

Dirk was stupid for a long moment, from sleep first, then from a certain memory. For I had not told him about the wedding: coming home, Zayda and I had been speechless of what had happened.

Prue? he repeated. But what— Didn't she get married today?

No, I said. And now something has happened to her. Oh, Dirk, do come. Father is bringing her.

And I ran back downstairs again, for I heard them on the lane.

Dirk came just as he was. He was there at the door when Father reached it. Together he and Father and I managed, somehow . . . She was large, and heavy, a dead kind of collapsed weight, but we managed; and when she came back to consciousness she was upstairs in my bed.

I knelt beside her, full of words now, my mind flooded with words of supplication for her. We were alone when she opened her eyes. She recognized me, and where she was. All too clear, her mind came back to her; and all at once.

Julia, she said, did you hear the boat? Did you know it was . . .

Yes, I said, but no one else did. Don't worry about that, Prue. For myself I am glad.

She opened her eyes widely, to look it all at me as she said:

— Do you think that I would not be glad too, for myself? Do you think that just for myself I would have gone through all that?

In this way she told me—what Zayda and I had suspected, but had not been able to bring to any word, hardly to any thought . . . Now I was unable to answer her.

She took a sudden new fright: Julia, how bad am I hurt? Have you sent for a doctor yet?

I told her that Father was waiting to see how she was before he went for one. She tried to sit up, crying aloud:

— Don't let him go, oh, don't let him. I'll be all right, I'll . . .

But with her effort pain came suddenly, seizing her, silencing her. I jumped up to call Father, but she held me back

with her eyes—with something new come into them, with the pain. And in another moment she gasped:

— Don't Julia, not yet. Everyone would know then . . .

Her pain gone, she rested for a long moment while I sat realizing for her—going over it one way and the other: risk of waiting until I might be able to drive her to the city against having the doctor here, and everyone knowing. When she opened her eyes again, it was with her pain's full information in them. And something else that came in an impassioned cry of look and word wrung from her:

— Julia, I didn't. I swear it! I tried to ride, I tried to choose life for it and myself . . . Oh, Julia, you do believe, it was an accident, it was!

I did believe her, though for one moment I had wondered.

— Yes, Prue, yes. I know you rode it through, the real you!

Then I asked her if she could wait until I drove her . . .

Her answer came clear and determined: I will wait!

JULY

Time at Its Fullness

The summer was accomplished and over when we came back, two weeks in July—just over its green, in the first tint of the harvest yellow in the grasses. Father and Dirk were working in the front yard when we came. Even before he welcomed us back, he spoke of the time at hand.

The meadows will be ready to cut in another week, he said as he opened the gate to us. And then, as I stopped the car to lean out of it for his paternal kiss, he added, with good dramatic effect:

— And Drake Parker and his wife are coming to do it!

Then he went around on the other side of the car saying: Hello, Prue. Mighty glad you're better!

And he leaned in and kissed her lightly, as he had kissed me. Tears welled in Prue's eyes, and she lowered them as Dirk . . .

Wait until you see Janet, Dirk said. She has been howling for two weeks about your keeping the car in town. We've been housebound, positively housebound!

But he was not being ironic; rather, kind—kind and casual, like Father, to cover our return. Toward Prue he shrugged: Hello, Prue. And then he went back to his sickling.

By now Prue was forgetting herself: Oh, do you mean, Drake is able?

He has mind only for his Lutie and the labor of the land, Father answered, but it seems enough—it seems to include everything else.

It does, Prue exclaimed warmly. Oh, it does! After all, for any of us, there is little more than one moment; and often not even one person.

But now Janet came running down the lane, as if to take the car from me.

— Jay Jarrell, if ever you take that car again! We've been positively housebound!

Utterly! said Dirk from his knees before one of the trees.

I've had Hilda, Father observed mildly. Prue, you won't know your horse. I've put her under gunfire.

Janet was looking at Prue sharply. Probably she had seen Father kiss her; then too, in being a woman—and such a woman!—she might have suspected . . .

Really, Miss Tyler, she said, I wish you would take that horse of yours away. I've lived in terror, positive terror, all week with the Colonel riding her.

In Janet's voice was intoned: Really, Miss Tyler, I wish you would go and take that horse with you.

Prue heard this, and stiffened at my side. She had been so warm and yielding, suffering had broken her resistance. She was still deeply entrenched in herself, but behind a defense that had fallen. She had started back feeling: Let anyone find it out if they want to! We had made only a mild effort to cover what had happened, sending word back that Prue had had an accident on her horse, near our house, and that I had discovered it and taken her on to the city to a hospital. This was only Zayda's effort and mine, taken for her. When she came through alive she did not care: she had ridden through all lesser feeling such as shame or pride broken: she was indeed on that 'other side' looking back

upon all personal feeling. But could she keep this view—with suspicion immediately before her, as it was now, in Janet—this woman-form of it? Or before other immediate attitudes—the kind understanding that was in Father, or the quick, rough tact in Dirk? Were there not signs that she was already losing it?—those quick tears before Father, eyes lowered to Dirk, and now the resistance to Janet and her voice cold as she answered: I'll take the mare if you wish, and I'm going home right away, soon as Jed comes for me.

But then Zayda appeared, running, and the words of her welcome restored Prue to her first bravery. They were all of Drake: how much better he was, how he was able to work and would be coming to cut the hay. Intoned was: Drake's coming through it, he isn't defeated either. Zayda's words were all one cry of triumph; she cast a glow of this about Prue's return.

Afterward, while Prue was upstairs resting, I went on back to where Father and Dirk were working. I went to talk of Drake and the sudden harvest. This I had been associating with fall: how could it be, in July? I stood there on the lane looking at the meadow land across the road, that was ripe for cutting. How, in early summer, death beginning? Involved in fruition, death? It was a sudden shock of inward seeing.

I found Father feeling the same way.

I looked as dazed as you, he said, when Zayda asked me a few days ago when we meant to cut our hay. All of a sudden it ripened and was ready. It made me feel our year here was almost over.

In what he said I heard my own sudden sadness spoken. Yes, this meant the year: this year—of all my years, I thought, this one, and already it is at harvest!

In the house Zayda had just shown me two shelves of

glass jars: the first planting of the beans and beets had come on while I was gone, and she and Cleony had preserved them. Good thing you're back, she told me, to help can the garden. But, I wondered, beans canned for winter? and hay to be cut and stored? End of year, this year of all my years!

Well, anyway, Father was sighing, we will get to see Drake Parker. Even Kirtley didn't expect that for us.

Kirtley? That name, I had not been hearing it. Off there in the hospital with Prue, where nothing of him lived, where nothing lived but Prue, where I myself was Prue. Kirtley? This was a return to him again! It was thinking toward him: Drake Parker is coming!

Father was talking: It's a little strange, I haven't had any further word from him, nothing about the mare, or anything. I rather expected . . .

And so had I!—some answer to those letters. Now Father spoke also my expectation, as he had my sadness. Uneasy my thought of my letters lay, of all I had written: was the risk taken too great? presumption to be felt in the writing I had done for myself, not for Father? That letter about May, ardent of description, impassioned of thought about Drake and his accident; and of June—about Prue, our ride, our talk of Drake, the horse she had to shoot, and what she had said about her coming marriage . . . Too intimate of another, of all these others, that were as himself? Only my being away had kept me from writing the rest about Prue; I had heard it all from her only with thought of telling him—at least about her ride, how splendid that was, how like Drake himself. Only now I was realizing how far I had lived all these things just to tell him of them. I felt cut off from this one source of words in me as I built thought from Father's words: I must not write any more until he has in

some way answered. But my decision was faint; even in the moment I longed to run up to my desk and put it down on paper: 'Drake Parker and his wife are coming to cut hay for us; soon I shall have all to tell you of him, that you must be waiting to hear.'

Father meanwhile had returned to his work, driving a team he had borrowed from Zayda, to the click of a blade cutting. I went and sat beside Dirk where he was sickling the tall grass around the roots of the pines. I had something to tell him.

— Listen, Dirk, about Prue . . .

He kept his back turned.

— I did something in town, against her will. Before she knew of it, I had to.

He cut widely from where he sat, trying to look away from me.

Why confide in me? he grumbled. He had scent of something; he was withdrawing into himself hastily, from that one moment of congeniality toward Prue.

— Because it concerns you. I had to use your name.

— My name? Good Lord, Jay! Now what have you been thinking up?

Listen, I said sharply. This is just between us; not even Father need know. Let him guess if he must. But I'm not telling him. Maybe you've guessed; you were considerate a while ago. Thanks for that. But you can't know what I had to do.

Get at it, he said gruffly. Let's just hope it wasn't too, too novelistic.

— It may be that, but I meant it only as financial.

— Fi— Good God, Jay! You haven't charged anything to me, have you?

— Yes. Prue's hospital bill.

He went wordless.

— Oh, don't worry! You wont have to pay it; I just had to have your name to send it to.

— But why mine?

He was even beyond all invective.

— Because I had to—to have a husband for Prue.

Silence. Still silence. Then one cold, round, all-containing: Oh!

I don't care what you think, I said vehemently. I had to do it. If it had only been her injuries from her horse! But there was something else—it happened there, few hours after we had come; and to explain that I had to have a husband for her. When I began giving names yours came along with my own, that's all. And our address for the bill. It was so—so credible, her sister-in-law coming with her, husband out of town and all that. After all, Dirk, it was a spot to be in. Remember, I had to take her as she was in riding clothes. I just said she was thrown and as a result . . .

It was still quite impossible to say the word. All the more so to him, he was taking it so badly—not superficially as I should have preferred, but hard, and into himself.

I'm sorry, Dirk, I said, becoming so: Just don't misunderstand. It seemed that you had nothing to lose, and it did protect Prue. She's going to sell a horse, maybe the mare, to pay for it, so that part is all right. And how could I have explained it otherwise?

Still silence.

— Dirk, say something, anything you like. Just don't sit there so tombstony. What is the matter? What difference does it make?

Then it came.

— Nothing, darling, and no difference whatever. Just a little surprise, and some more of my familiar brand of dis-

illusionment. You bring me to a place like this, so idyllic, back to nature innocent and fresh and naïve as Janet says—oh, yes, how innocent and all that! And with a nice little dash of immortal romance thrown in for extra measure: a dead man, a Greek goddess for a mistress and some heroic figure of a man for an illegitimate son, not to mention the madonna he has for a half-sister. You bring on two girls, one like a virgin who turns out also to have an illegitimate child, and the other like Diana of the Chase, and she has a miscarriage. And you charge this last little item to me. Oh, nothing, darling, nothing. Just a little surprise, and a little more disillusionment.

This was more like the Dirk I was used to.

I don't suppose, I snapped back, that you can conceivably see that a virgin can have a child, and a goddess of a girl, a miscarriage.

— I'm afraid I can't.

— That's just too bad, for you are missing what is here. Immortal romance, you call it. Right you are. I'm glad you've caught this much of it anyway. As for surprise, that's good. You need to be surprised out of being beyond surprise in yourself. And disillusionment—that's good, too. You still need more of it evidently, for the ground to be cleared utterly.

We were at it!

Jay, he said, I'd like to slap you hard.

— Not half so hard as I—!

We glared at each other. Then, suddenly, arms about his neck, clinging to him—as he to me.

— Oh, Dirk! Just don't say anything of this to anyone, and never let Prue feel anything more about it, one way or another. Ignore her all you want to—that is what she wants,

too. Just keep it straight in yourself. Oh, Dirk, you can think and feel so true about things! We are true together or can be!

Brat! he said. But he held on to me.

It was the embrace of our childhood. Sometimes when I was in it I even felt: It is prenatal, it is the way he and I got born together. Clinging to Dirk in this way, I could feel the two of us descending in space to birth as twins, to one life between us, one destiny. Against all loneliness and wanting, as children we clung to each other; against missing mother and father, feeling our isolation from our father somehow in the woman who had taken us at birth, our mother's sister—as if she were holding us as hostages for an exchange Father refused her. When we were grown to knowledge of men and women we found that it was so: she held us for a return to her that he never made.

Embrace of fear, and yearning; of feeling our lives held against— Against what was it now? What sudden something that both felt? Had Dirk spoken it when he said 'immortal romance'? Even as we held to each other in the moment, it seemed that we were reaching beyond—out of ourselves, our bone and blood, our very birth. As if to love not of this birth but beyond it, immanent of happening to us both. I felt my own yearning in Dirk, however he might reject or deny it: it was in those words that had spoken themselves to him; no irony of tone could belie them! It was toward love; beyond bone and blood and all bodily birth; out of all life and time past for us, living as promise in all life and time to come. Immortal romance? Yes! The immortal story—of life and love in life: toward this was our yearning, here in this place where somehow it hovered to be lived. For me it even bore a name now, it took one in

the very moment. Drake Parker! I could feel him coming toward us, here where we clung to each other—as if beckoned, to our need.

* * *

They were coming! I had been watching from the window, almost afraid of the event, after my last expectation. Fear had torn at hope: the nerves of it at the bone. He can't be as I think, as Zayda and Prue have said; we are all over-imaginative of him! Women, Dirk would say, women hard at imagining things. But what of Kirtley: what Drake meant to him? how Drake had come through the reality of all else, even war, for him?

But there was no need now to question, for they were coming! They were turning into the lane in the moment.

It was early in the morning, in a day gratuitous of its warmth for their labor. They came (I ran out onto the lane to see) driving a splendid young team, sorrel to the sun. Drake Parker was standing as he drove—huge and rigidly still, his size and stillness overwhelming all other impression. Beside him his wife was tiny, but in a blowing flutter of full skirts and a bonnet dangling on a ribbon from hair that was the color of the horses' tails waving in the light. The bed of their hay wagon was painted a bright cobalt, and its wheels were vermilion. Behind it, in tow, their mowing machine had blades lifted, sharp and bright-edged to the sun.

To the sight, as to that of Zayda coming, we all gathered now, Janet too. She had been worrying: Heavens, are you going to let that man who is half mad handle a blade and a pitchfork? And she had worked up in herself some horrible disaster to Father of the bucolic variety. But now, as she saw them: What a picture they make! (This was the first

inner picture she saw of the living script: something was so powerful in Drake Parker as to command even her to see it!)

At the door where we were all standing, Lutie Parker got out, while Drake stood on in the wagon, with the same rigor, no change of expression, no lifting or falling of his glance. What she said would have been abrupt had it not been so softly and shingly said: Where are we to start, please? Which is the field you want cut first?

We all stood speechless of any answer for another moment, before her pictorial prettiness: even Father, though he was prepared for it, having seen her before. She was so pretty, with short chestnut curls, eyes almost the color of the wagon, and with her dress to match them: such an artful dress, keenly blue, and cut trimly to her small figure, the bodice tight to a child's waist, then the skirt shirred to fullness from it; and with a hat to go with it—blue and chin-tied with cherry-colored ribbons. In this art of her dress, its perfect becomingness, and in all else that was finely studied and poised, and small and delicate, she appeared so ill suited to the work she had come to do as to hold us wordless with doubt as well as admiration. She had herself to break our silence, or rather to divert it to Drake—to contemplation of him, instead of herself. She turned back to the wagon now with a little gesture, as if to say: Look at him, look! See!

With one sight then, we saw—how he looked, standing there, in the wagon. So splendid a figure of a man as to pass all boundaries of the real into the ideal: into Figure of Man. Although he was too lean now for his own perfection of appearance, one could fill in the caves of cheek and shoulder and loin with the fullness of their proportions, and make a giant of the earth out of him. It mattered not at all that his

eyes were blank of the ordinary look of a man, that they held but one level of a glance distanced out of all sight: he better presented the myth of Man as it was, with vision unbounded. His sight seemed to span all the centuries of Time that Man had lived, and to be looking across the threshold of eons to come. It was somehow planetary: one thought of the way stars looked at one another, the space between them only infinite as Time, and Time itself not existent for them. As if he had permitted life to create out of him this picture, he stood there: as if this had always been his purpose, his destiny, his accident only accomplishing it. Only by design, at least, could the properties of such a picture come together: the bright wagon lifting the huge figure to the sky; the shining implements; the splendid team; and, in the picture's adoration, the woman, so small and fine-figured, with head flung back, looking intently upward.

Was it she who was making us see him in this way—compelling our vision with her desire for others to see through the catastrophe with her eyes, to the man's inner wholeness? I felt myself gathered into her intentness: to be knowing of him what she knew, not what I of myself, out of this self, could know of my humankind—of Man in the proportion of some Prototype of Man that sought in personal shape and destiny its own reflection, and here in this figure was—in the moment—finding its configuration and flashing it forth for eyes to see that could see. *And she had eyes to see!*—eyes of love to see!—and was showing us (me at least) some wholeness in Drake Parker that limned the Prototype imaginably into view for as long as I could hold myself to her intentness. This moment became related for me to those others—on hill, in the stream: now Man, and the Life of Man, wrote itself into that living scripture!

As if she knew when we—or one of us—had seen it, she

climbed back into the wagon beside him. With the kind of reaction that comes from such intentness, almost with gayety, she called: Tell us which field to begin with! And when Father pointed her to the west of the house, she drew the team into a sharp turn and went at a trot toward it. She called back over her shoulder: You may all come, if you like, or at least send Zayda.

* * *

The field lay on the other side of the hill of the dead, lower than this, yet high in itself, rising almost sheer to the incoming blue mists of the valley. The distance to the River on this day was one varying shade of blue; the River itself, the last atmosphere of it distinguishable from the sky. Always blue, today all was still bluer. The yellow of the grass made it that way, perhaps; or was it—blue in her eyes, and wagon, and dress?

When we went out to join them after our breakfast, they were mowing the grass, Drake driving the machine and Lutie tossing it into windrows to the sun. He bore still that first configuration, sitting tall and straight in the springy seat of the mowing machine; but the movement of the horse and blade, the grass shivering to the knife and falling, and the sound of these—padded foot, clicking blade, swishing grass—gave a more familiar human animation to the picture. However ill suited in size and strength she was to the labor, she made its perfect picture where—with three golden shafts of sunlight pronged to a slender fork—she threw hay up loosely to a filter of sunlight through it.

We joined her in her work, and all the morning I watched her closely for some shadow of him to fall upon her as he rode, rigid in silence, past us; for her being there in the sun, creature of its unwavering brightness, was incredible of its

serenity, its detached inner happiness. But, far from casting a shadow upon her, he intensified her brightness; she glowed as a light fanned to flame when he came near, stopping her work, silent as if to be in better communication with him. Though he would be riding with eyes fixed ahead of him, wherever she was as he drew near her, he would turn, or be drawn, and then his lips would part slightly as if to speech or a smile and the blankness of his eyes would momentarily fill up—but with nothing we could read from them, from no common expression. One could see it was of her and for her, the only consciousness of person that he had. Passing her, he would return as to stone.

She had said: We will cut this morning only what we can garner this afternoon; a few hours of curing in this sun will be enough, dry as the grass is. And when we went in to dinner she warned me: Take a good rest after dinner, for now the hard work begins. I had asked her to eat with us, but she said: Oh, thank you! But we have brought our lunch; we make a picnic of it and go off somewhere in the shade together. She took a pretty basket from the wagon and went up to him where he was still cutting. She just called his name several times, softly: Drake, Drake! then waved the basket to let it bear its own communication of meaning, and went and took his arm. A little later they crossed the barnyard, arm in arm—he relaxed, almost tremulous under her touch. And a happiness shone from his face, not through any one medium, not from him so much as through him; not visible, perhaps, yet communicable to all seeing him. Even Dirk, watching with me, reflected it; even Dirk—a certain whole brightening as flame from ember coming from him. And he made a sudden confession of himself, with that accuracy of observation to which he was given: That man makes me

feel that what has happened to me is only to a part of myself that is as nothing to the whole!

Yes! This was the suggestion from Drake Parker, the *whole* of man. The whole time and tide of his being. There was—some immense span of time and being in time in his configuration: between the earth labor of his hands and the mind-distance in his eyes.

* * *

For a week we worked with the hay, one day folding into another in one almost unbroken likeness. Jed and Prue came to help. Jed pitched with Dirk, to wagon or stack, while Drake spread it. Zayda and Prue and I rode horses to stacks that Lutie threw together. Dirk had insisted upon pitching, being almost fierce about it. Again he said to me, with self-confession: I want to be near that man, I want to see for myself.

At first he could not quite make it with one arm, and Drake showed a shadow of impatience with him, in his first awareness of anyone but Lutie. Then she took him aside and said single words to him, over and over, until they penetrated through to his own experience. Accident, she said, and Pain, pain, pain. Over and over. Pain to arm, she said, not to head, but arm. She created Dirk's pain and his loss within herself; and through her Drake saw, or somehow understood. When he went back to Dirk he was as patient with him as he was with himself, when he had something newly to learn. She had created otherness for him, the first since his accident. Afterward she told me this, with new hope taken in it.

Father meanwhile went on with the cutting. At the barn he helped us with the hay, coming to handle the fork on the

pulley, while Jed and Drake went up in the loft. Even Janet came out now, drawn by the sheer force of activity. Father sent her after the horse that lifted the fork, to guide the chain or keep the singletree off his hoofs. Janet's gasps and shrieks were almost all the sound in the tremendous silence of labor kept by Drake Parker. Out in the field, when we were putting up the last of the clover hay into a stack, Drake went up alone to peak it, and then again we saw it: his huge figure against the sky, standing in isolation, figure of Man lifted from earth, becoming planetary.

So the incessant labor went on through a week of invariable weather, nights bright and warm as the days were, with only a moon for difference. Sometimes as we rode close to the stack Lutie would say one thing or another about Drake up there on the rising peak of it. She seemed to feel my inner wanting to hear. All through the week she felt her way toward me, for what on the last day . . .

It was during the noon hour. She had left Drake sleeping in the shade fringing the field and had come over to where I was lying at rest in the shadow of a hedge. Dirk and Prue had gone off for water, Prue starting alone and Dirk going after to help her. He had not yet caught up to her: there they were, moving behind their barriers—Dirk's arm and her remembrance. Lutie dropped down beside me and looked after them.

— It is hard for your brother now; but, if ever he does see it through, he may come to take his loss as a gain.

Is it possible, I asked to prompt her, that you are already seeing through Drake's accident?

Yes! she breathed. But it isn't my vision but Drake's own. He has always given this to me, from the beginning.

— The beginning?

— Yes, when I first saw him.

— And that?

She smiled: You're drawing it out of me, aren't you? Zayda said you would—Miss Julia will get you somehow to tell her, she said. But I don't mind; I want everyone to know about Drake, more now than ever before. I want everyone to know how he was.

— And I want to know that. Really, Lutie, this is what Kirtley Hayes sent us here to learn—about Drake.

Kirtley? She was surprised by the name: But I don't know him, and I didn't dream he had any real understanding of Drake. I was married the last time he came, but of course he did not try to see us—because—it was really through me that his sister came to do that terrible thing—marry Brent Hayes.

Now I was surprised!

— Through you, Lutie?

She flushed, and bent her head as if to some memory of shame.

— Yes. You see, I came here in the first place to marry Brent.

I was wholly unprepared for this: there was nothing in the Letter, no intonation of this in what I had read: no resentment of Drake in any connection.

Of course, she said to my astonishment, Kirtley Hayes doesn't know much about me. It happened indirectly through me. When I left Brent to marry Drake, Brent's mother sent for his sister to come on a visit, just as she had had me come, and somehow twisted her into marrying Brent.

— Twisted, Lutie?

— Yes, that is the sort of thing Brent's mother could do. She had her own way of bringing things about that was half torture, through pity, and half persuasion—through money. She got me to come in this way—to consider Brent at least.

I'll say this for myself—I was not actually engaged to him. I hadn't really agreed to do it!

Then she told me; or somehow I saw in what she said, as I had seen Zayda's story—the thing pictured.

* * *

Lutie had come stranger to this countryside, her connection only through her mother, and this but a girlhood friendship between Brent Hayes' mother and her own. It was all slight when you looked back upon it, slight and accidental—merely a meeting one day in Lexington where Lutie lived, a meeting between two women who had not seen each other for many years.

But death had happened meanwhile to serve this meeting: the death of Lutie's father, and of Old Hayes. It was two widows who met, each with an experience of death, recent. Lutie's mother walked on this day in deep mourning—not of grief, however, but of fear. Fear of Money. Death was debt to her, it was not death but debt. She had been walking in town with Lutie, saying to her: I don't know what we are to do; there is no money. Can you realize this, no money! Lutie could not realize it; there had always been money or something that stood for it: a family name, a house in the name's tradition, an identity in themselves with name and house. She could not grasp the difference that death could make. Had they not the same name and house? But no, it seemed that the house was gone: they had just come from some office where they were told the house was gone. The name, of course, was left. But would it stand without the house and the rest of the substance attached to it that counted as money? Lutie's mother, still wholly faithful of the name, thought that it must stand alone. She and Lutie had just tried it out on this day with some success, however

small. Lutie had needed a new coat, more toward the color of mourning: not mourning, for this was not becoming to little Lutie; but something toward gray. In one of the shops they had seen the adorable Mangonne model that Lutie was wearing in the moment: a lovely twilight gray-blue with a tiny collar of squirrel buttoned up to the chin. It was expensive, and they were almost without all money. But the name, the name—it was still theirs, wasn't it? Charge it, her mother had said, trying the name out alone. She gave the address of the great house and its columns: it was no longer theirs but would for many years belong to the name. And Lutie wore the coat out of the store. They went into another: for, her mother reasoned, if the name could stand for a coat it might take on a hat—such a little more. And such a little hat! The very one for the fitted coat—tiny and a toque, and so chic in being of velvet this early in the fall. Now really Lutie looked charming, and as if nothing had happened to their fortune. Lutie, in the clothes, thought: Nothing has happened. And so her mother, looking at her: I declare, Lutie, I just can't believe it. And for a little while, both of them—walking—did not believe it.

So they were walking—against time, however, against having no home to return to after a week more of time—when they met Brent Hayes and his mother. Fancy, after all these years! So, the two mothers . . .

— Fancy my having a son grown and you a daughter! And both being widows. How long for you, my dear—? Just? Oh, I am so sorry, I am one for a few months longer, and do believe me, even that much time helps a little.

— Ah, but time, time! There isn't much left, is there, my dear? And one must think of one's children!

— So that is your concern too? But of course, every mother! To think of leaving them alone . . .

So the two mothers! And Brent? He looked well on this day, so quiet and remote, distant but not vacant. He just stood and smiled with a kind of winning loneliness to all his mother was saying, about his being an only child, born late in both her own life and her husband's, and being so much alone on such a gigantic estate. He was tall and broad, but had a face with a haunt of illness about it. Lutie felt pity for him before his mother tried to create it. She saw his illness before his mother spoke of it, saying: Brent has been ill, we are in now to see a doctor, you must excuse him, but he is really better, so much better . . . Then she looked to Brent soothingly and said: Brent dear, wouldn't you like some tea now, and shall we not all go?

Brent nodded and smiled and stepped into place beside Lutie. He said almost nothing; but he smiled, and he helped her down and up curbs with a longing kind of touch on her arm, a kind of reaching toward her across a distance he seemed not able to transcend with words. And he looked at her with such absolute simplicity, such hidden and uncomplicated pleasure in—just looking at her . . .

In another week she and her mother were at Hayescroft.

Oh, but this is what we've been used to! her mother said when she saw the great house and the broad fields rolling from it. It was nothing more or less than she was accustomed to having, and so ought to have, on any terms. She was not aware of the difference with which this house and its land had been builded—of the tremendous force of Old Hayes back of it, his true and absolute ownership. She saw it all in continuity only with their own life and need. Her mother said simply from the beginning: We must have Hayescroft; thinking of nothing else, not of the terms that were—Brent.

Brent's mother had made no attempt to hide her inten-

tions in having them here. She, too, was single-minded of *her* need. This was Brent. There was the land, of course, that had somehow to be managed; but before this came—Brent. She told about him, with engaging honesty. He had certain spells, yes, but not often; he was constantly getting better, and the doctor in town had just told her that marriage ought to do wonders for him to relieve certain—tensions. It was all a matter of keeping him quiet, and pleased, and relieved of all sense of insecurity. So often he had asked, tragically: What would I do if you were not here, Mother? After a spell. It was a fear of being alone, a terrible fear. It really brought the spells on. If there could be no fear, absolute security in someone who would be with him all the time, night and day—someone who cared, who would be quiet and devoted, more devoted even than herself who was getting old, and anyway, a mother—really the tie was too close, someone with more detachment was needed. It was better not to have a passionate attachment in a marriage for Brent; much better for the marriage to be deliberately entered into, for reasons on the girl's side that were not just of love . . .

She soon came right out with it: You are the one, Lutie! Oh, don't you see? So quiet and gentle and detached as you are—really remote, Lutie, living somewhere in yourself. You are the very one! If only you would, I could die in a peace I have never known a moment in my life. And think what you would do for Brent! And what would it cost you? Just a little inconvenience now and again, and compassion for him, nothing else. Oh, perhaps you should not have children, but he will be as a child to you—he is so sweet and dependable, you will learn to love him. Maybe not in the usual way, Lutie, but I tell you: you are not strong for that sort of love anyway; you haven't been brought up to it, few

southern gentlewomen are. You are tender, rather, and it is tenderness he needs.

It was not only his mother but her own: But, Lutie, we have nothing. And think of our debts: we can't even pay for your coat with what we have. And she is right: you aren't built for marriage of any—any passion. I wasn't either—really, Lutie . . . rather abhorrent . . . Of course you will have to, now and again, but he will be like a child in your hands, he adores you now, he simply adores you . . .

This was true, and this was the greater persuasion: Brent, following her around with the appeal of his mother's words in his eyes. He had had none of his spells since she had come; he was radiant with that peace and happiness which, his mother said, love would bring him. Still, how could she?—with some other conception of life and of love far back in her mind, and deep in her soul: one that nothing her mother said, or that she herself had seen, could shadow or weaken. It was like a hidden capacity in her, which was untouched as yet, with nothing of herself as she was to draw upon it. Nothing she was or spoke or did so much as broke its surface. There was something in Brent himself—his mute appeal, his response of happiness to her—that made her aware of this capacity, that even gathered toward it, as if to break through its surface. Certain new issues of tenderness, acute as pain, profound as sorrow, presaged such a break. But still her deeper selfhood held itself intact against all their attacks upon it; she felt only little scratches made—feeling reflected, but not original from those depths. While she could not draw upon these, still she knew them there within her; and she could not do less than keep them in reserve.

She could not promise! Not yet. She told his mother: That other reason of which you spoke is money, and it is too large a one yet. Even if I were to marry Brent for com-

passion, I should want it to be mostly for this. First I must try to make a way, myself. Both mothers smiled at this: she, with her genteel education, her inexperience, her delicacy: what could she do? It was a question she had to press upon herself through many days and nights, before an answer came. Then it was only half an answer. She would teach music. She had always had a pretty sort of talent for it; she had made a special study of it in the finishing school she had attended; she knew enough to teach small children, at any rate. She bound herself to a future with Brent this far: she would stay on at Hayescroft with her mother through the winter, and get some children in the neighborhood as her pupils. Brent's mother smiled: Twenty pupils at the most, let us say, at fifty cents a lesson. My dear little Lutie, that wont pay for your coat alone until the winter is over.

That everlasting coat! If only her mother had not bought it that day! Still, her mother reminded her, it was the way they both looked that had given Brent's mother her idea. She had since said: Lutie in that coat and hat was just too charming. If only it might have been warmer, now that winter was coming on and she had no other, and was planning to drive the countryside over, going after pupils!

She began teaching in October. Brent's mother got her first pupils for her; she practically ordered the children of some of her tenant families to take lessons. It was all just to humor and indulge Lutie. On the first day she went to teach, she walked, for it was only across the field to the first tenant house. It was then—she saw Drake Parker.

He caught her trying to climb a fence, in fright from a cow that she thought was a bull. He simply emerged out of the earth, it seemed, just when—caught on a barb of the wire—she stood there straddling it, crying into space for

help. He came up out of the field she meant to cross, stood for a moment studying her, frowned darkly at her, then laughed, and went and lifted her off the wire—deftly, without tearing her skirt where she was caught—and set her down this side of it.

Now where do you think you're going? he asked her.

She looked and saw—yes, she saw all in the moment, though she did not know what this all was. Afterward, as it came slowly to her in its separate parts, it was only a building back into something that, in this first meeting, she felt and knew of him. And of herself. Standing there before him, having to look up, and shade her eyes under her toque from the bright unshaded October sun, to see: standing there she felt him—as herself, as she had still to be. As that Self untouched yet, untried, unbroken; as that capacity within her to be!

It was all profoundly a mystery—how she felt him. It was as a force, one both outside and within her. His touch, in lifting her off the fence, had been like this: a shock of energy, flowing as between two poles.

She could not answer him now though he repeated his question and bent from his great height, as if to let her see what she was straining and blinking to make clear. And he added another question:

— And who do you think you are?

He was almost rude, though there was a kind of humor in his voice. He was really asking—and, the way he put it, it all seemed only a matter of thinking—where she had been going, who she was. In her answer that came at last to him, she felt herself within, drawing for the first time from that true, original source of herself.

Since you put it that way, she said, it doesn't seem worth

telling. But if you ask me where I am going and who I am . . .

He caught her up before she could find her own way to what she was saying, through that difference of thinking and being:

— All right then. Where and who?—really, not just thinking about it.

She considered his remark sadly: No place and nobody, I reckon. Or just out into that space there, trying to find out myself who I am.

He smiled: That is pretty negative, but it has the advantage of being true. However, I know who others think you are, and where you thought you were going.

She felt a little tart about this: You do? Then why did you ask?

Just to hear how you would put it, he said drily. You're the girl who has been brought in to marry Brent Hayes, and you think you're going to give music lessons here and around to make it look to yourself as if you weren't marrying him for his money.

In the rush of things to say to that, she gave way first to: This is rude of you. It is true but rude—awfully.

I meant it that way, he said. I feel rude about a thing like this; it is something I can't feel less than rude about.

But why on earth? she exclaimed.

She had her eyes steadily shaded now and could see him. He had come closer, and was bending down farther. She stared. And then demanded of him, no less directly than he of her: Who are *you*?

Drake Parker, he said. And it is a matter of being it and not just thinking.

She had not heard of him as yet. He read her unknowing from her.

Just ask anybody who that is, he laughed as he straightened up again: You'll hear it on all sides. If you want the worst of it, ask Brent Hayes' mother. Don't bother Brent with it, don't bother Brent with anything. It isn't his fault or mine; it goes back farther than that. Well, goodbye. I've got that fence to fix now that you've broken it down. Go right on down that hill and over the creek—that's the house you want.

And he strode away, down the line of fence, as if inspecting it.

She did not ask, she did not want to know. She wanted him left as he was—as rude as that, yes, but as rude with truth and directness and power. Shocks, as of new energy, kept passing through her as she went on down the hill; she kept thinking: This is the first time anybody has ever spoken straight and true out of himself to me, into myself. Of course this must be rude—how else could it be? If it were polite, there would be some avoidance; or if tactful, some covering up. No, it is all right, it is absolutely right as it is. He is right, he is the rightest person I ever knew. I hope I see him again. He makes me think I might do it after all—what I've only thought I might.

She gave the lesson and returned the way she had come, hoping. She did not see him; but at the place where she had climbed the fence there were two blocks made, on both sides, to form little steps. The wire had been straightened, but where the steps were, the points had been filed off. To go over it was to feel him lifting her again, and setting her down, and looking, and asking . . .

November came. She had ten pupils now, and she was driving an old car of Brent's the wide distances they lived apart. She still went over the fence at that place to the first one, never failing to see and to feel him there, though he

never appeared again. She had seen him several times in the field, and he had waved to her; but he never came to speak. It was true, she had heard by now who he was, and on all sides; but, happily, most of it from Zayda. There was a likeness; she saw it, and tried to get to know her for this reason. Not to hear about him, just to see that likeness. But after she met Zayda she was content to know her for her own sake. She saw his mother once, and that was all but seeing him. But she dared not go often to see Zayda; for some day he would cross her path again, and he would know. What do you think you are doing that for? he would think, if, actually, he would not say it.

November—and it was cold, and she had only the Mangonne coat, though Brent's mother kept trying to press a fur coat upon her. It was really only heavy enough for fall; and she was cold-blooded at best. Not strong, not resistant. You'll never last the winter through, traveling about this way, Brent's mother said. Brent was beginning to get a little querulous about her being away so much. He seemed content only when she was about the house. She played double Canfield with him; at such times he was normal—clever at the cards, genial, gentle with her, quite persuasive. Once or twice he leaned across the cards and gently kissed her; and she even felt a sort of response—of that tenderness. His mother kept persuading: Oh, do give up this driving about in all kinds of weather, and let us all go South for the worst months! What are you waiting on, Lutie? You have only to let yourself love Brent. He will get better with you around, he will!

The weather was bad. One day, it was bitter. She felt just this in the wind and the icy rain—bitterness. She felt bitter. Why not? she asked herself as she drove across one of the highest ridges of the land, the car closed but still cold,

her teeth fairly chattering. Why not marry him after all? There could be no use in the end to this—this going about earning five or seven dollars a week, maybe ten if she worked at it long enough. Ten, against all those debts! And against all her mother was used to, and seemed to expect, unconditionally, the rest of her life. What feeble independence, this! What do you think you're doing! Better ask outright: What am I doing? And accept the answer: Nothing. Just a brave little show of something, but nothing, really; just beating time, putting up one more front.

So she rode until . . . There ahead of her he was, walking. Along the windy ridge, toward the village where she was going. She brought the car to a sudden stop, having thought until she came up to him that she must pass, not stop. She stopped so suddenly she stalled her engine. Lowering the window a crack, she called: Hello there! Can I give you a lift—same as you gave me once?

He whipped around in the wind and looked at her and the car. She felt him thinking: Brent Hayes' car! He hesitated a moment, deciding openly what to do. Then he came up to the car, but stood outside, looking at her through that crack. She lowered the window; the wind tore through it. She could not help it—her teeth chattered, she shivered.

You're cold, he said. Better close that window and go on.

Oh, please! she chattered. Get in. Let me give you a lift.

You're not dressed warmly enough, he said, blocking the open window now with his big body, leaning slightly as if to give her a warmth with which he himself was tingling.

That coat now, he said. It's pretty and all that, but not warm enough.

— It's all I've g-g-goṭ.

— Why don't you get Brent Hayes' mother to give you another?

— Must you be horrid always? Doesn't any s-s-situation call forth any k-kindness in you?

He looked steadily at her: Yes, it does. But a kindness I've got to be careful of.

He opened the door and got in, and closed the window. She was all but overwhelmed with him here, so large, the car seeming much too small. She herself so very small at the wheel: she felt as if she should crawl under it to make more room for him. It was not only his size, but his tremendous presence: the directness and force of it: how it was stripped and bared to essentials—no evasions, no elaborations.

Think she'll make the next hill with me in here? he asked, reading her sense of his size and strength from her.

Well, she answered, trying to start the motor: I don't count for anything at all, so—maybe.

She could not start the engine.

You're flooding it, he said. Let it stand a moment.

And he sat back in the seat. She shrank away from him to her side, just because she felt so small and futile.

How long are you going to keep this up? he asked, after a moment of studying her openly.

I don't know, she shivered. Brent's mother just asked me that herself. She wants me to give up and go South with them.

— Why don't you?

— I don't know. I wonder myself. Brent is sweet; he needs me, he's happy with me.

— Oh, he is. How sweet!

You're mean, she said, about Brent. You said yourself it isn't his fault.

— That's right. But if he should accept the sacrifice they're trying to make of you, that would be his fault.

She was silent, and tried the motor again. Still it would

not start. She shivered, from more than the outward cold.

You're cold, he said again. And took off the sweater he was wearing with: Here, wear this. Keep it in the car, if you want to—it's an old one. Put it on over that pretty little coat of yours.

He was just in his woolen shirt; but his skin was glowing with ruddy warmth. She saw how dark his hair and brow and eyes; how perfect the features, like his mother's. But this was not all, there was something else, overpowering: she shuddered a little, and bent her head to the wheel, wanting to weep.

He put the sweater across her shoulders. She felt that touch again descending.

I could be kind, he said, with kindness threatening his voice, like some new mighty kind of tenderness: I could be kinder to you than to anyone. But—kindness isn't what you need. You see how it is: it makes you cry, it weakens you. What you need is to be given strength, one way or another. Even if it has to be sort of—goaded into you.

With hand trembling she reached again for the ignition. This time it caught. She knew not whether to be glad or sorry. She went into gear roughly, grinding into it.

It's a wonder, he said, they didn't give you a better car than this.

I wouldn't take it, she answered, looking straight ahead. I didn't want to take this one, but I couldn't walk some of the places—too far, and too cold.

— You feel cold terribly, don't you? You're sort of delicate.

I'm t-trying not to be, she said between teeth she was setting against the cold, and his filling up the car so, and crowding her almost out of it.

Yes, he said. You're trying, you're making the effort. I

believe that now, as I didn't before. It's fine to see a woman, and one as small as you are, actually making the effort. Even if you don't come out, you've taken a step you never will go back on. I'll be glad of that, even if you shouldn't hold out the winter. Here's where I get off. Thanks for the lift. No, keep the sweater. I don't need it: cold or hot, weather is all of one kind to me. I have a way of making my own inside.

He laughed as he got out: Puzzle that out. See if you can't make your weather inside, too. Then maybe you wont have to go South after all.

Now he held out his hand: Thanks, and good luck, either way.

Almost timid of his grasp, she gave him her hand. He held it openly in his big palm, looking at it.

So small, he said. How do you stretch an octave?

I can't, she said, I just reach the seventh.

— Well, that's doing pretty well at that. I would have thought hardly more than the fifth.

Still he studied her hand, not holding it but somehow keeping it there.

— What do you know about music?

I sing, he said. Lord, how I sing! I've got a voice to fill all out-of-doors.

— I'd like to hear you.

— Come to church some time, and you will. I don't sing in the choir—not hardly; but I sing into the hymns. Everybody keeps still, once I join in on them.

And he threw back his head and laughed with all that tone of his singing.

He gave her hand a little grip and then dropped it.

— Well, goodbye. And I hope you wont go South.

December. She said to Brent's mother and her own: Wait until after Christmas. I'm preparing some children for an entertainment at the church. She had since gone there, even though he might think . . . He was not there when the service started, but he came in shortly afterward. She knew when he came, without turning. There was a little tremble in the audience. She could read the thought behind it: Illegitimate! But she knew from herself also: that shock returning.

He did not sing into the first hymns. She strained to hear; she felt him knowing that she was listening and teasing her. Just at the end he came in, and—it was almost true!—the others almost stopped singing. His voice was splendid, all untrained of breath, too much breath in it, given fully and sometimes not holding out quite; but its pitch was accurate, and its tone as large as he, and deeply drawn from all his being. Her whole body, in hearing it, was as a string struck by its vibration; and all her feeling was like a tone included in its harmony. Nothing in her went beyond what he was, singing: all-included, she felt for the first time in her life her own being combined and given full statement. When, after the service, she told him how good his voice was, he said: Thanks. If it were singing lessons you gave, I might take some.

Now she went to the church regularly, and not only to feel him there, but all else that his presence changed for her. It expanded everything through all barriers against it. Here in the church it even expanded worship from its confinement in the minds of the congregation. And all the words spoken from the pulpit, however feeble or distorted or wholly unimagined their meaning might be in the mind of the man speaking them. From them came some world-reaching, all-sounding, all-singing planetary psalm of life.

Just before Christmas she was called upon to play the

organ for a Sunday service, when the organist was sick. The small music that she made with her small talent took on greater dimensions in the largely empty night close outside the church; and she felt herself chiming in with the tremendous singing firmament of stars in the sky, and the small-voiced small creatures of the earth.

She felt all this, through Drake Parker. He gave extension to all places that contained him, he gave expansion to her mind, thinking. On this Sunday she knew it was he: playing where he was for the first time, she heard in her music new tone, new decision; she fairly ripped open the old organ when he came into the singing. And for a moment all fell away—she played, he sang, there was no earth under them, but only night and all the stars chiming in for the chorus.

* * *

No, she would not go South. She had the job now at the church, three dollars a Sunday for the winter. She just would not go. Let them go if they wanted to, without her. With January bad and Brent restless, they finally went without her: If you promise you will make up your mind by the time we get back! I promise. Now that they were gone and she was alone in the great house with just the servants, she felt able to make it up, in all this silence and extensity. But she would take her time: all winter she would take, all of it. It was grand living alone like this; she did like the big house and all the land rolling away from it. Almost she could marry Brent, just to live on here and be, now and again, alone. But, married to him, would she be alone ever? And would not there be barriers against this sudden extensity she was feeling, this all but unbearably joyous sense of freedom, of being free?

* * *

March came in stormy, with the River at flood, and all the creeks swollen. The road to the church went under in several places, and there was talk of discontinuing the services. For several week nights she had been playing to a church almost empty—yet all the more filled by his presence. For he never failed to come. Rivers? Creeks? She had a picture of him all but walking *on* water, going where he willed to go. Here, to these funny little services for which he was too large—voice, thought, feeling. Why did he come? Was it not because all was included for him, nothing being too small or mistaken? Did not all speak the Word for him—the preacher's speaking of it being the least sound—with wind and rain, thunder and swollen waters outside to give the greater utterance? New intonations came to her. In the beginning was the Word. A thousand voices began to speak it. But, although all spoke it, yet was it unspeakable! It was light shining, it was life as light shining!

Now, within, it became this—now in March, in the time of the storms; within, that surface began to break, over that inner capacity for being; and she began consciously to draw from this, the first drops from the deep, deep well. She only spoke what came from this—to herself: she went around the big house talking to herself, words within words . . . Let the servants think what they would: that she was mad herself, and a fit mate for Brent Hayes! Now a new rebellion began to arise in her. Against herself, for being so small and delicate and so—shivery. This was her word for herself, for all that had lived so sheltered against exposure. She would stand at the window in a storm and say: Oh, come on, beat in on me, let me feel you! I've dodged and shuddered and hidden under things too long as it is. And she rebelled against her mother who had done the sheltering, herself sheltered in turn. With a life of unreality, a fabrication of debt—it was

not only one of money, but of life-values. Her mother had tried to pay for everything with a name and an address. She was not what she thought she was—she had never bothered to be it.

And she rebelled against Brent's mother. There was more reality in her—Old Hayes had driven her to that, and Brent's illness. But what was she doing about it? Asking another to bear it for her, as she herself had been bearing it—all covered over, defended, protected. And now her rebellion extended to Brent himself. He was not trying either! He was accepting himself as he was, he was making no effort to break through all his mother's elaborate protections. He was ready enough to accept this sacrifice of her to his need, and too ready! He wanted to be kept quiet, he could not bear being disturbed. Oh, she knew how terrible, how cruel . . . when they came on him. But even when he was all right he was this way; he had drifted into being it. He made no effort! With all the land, no effort whatever to see to it, even when he was well. He had no interests, not even in horses. Double Canfield! She would not play another game with him; nor ever let him kiss her, gently—gently! Let him have his fits! She would not!—nor walk in the moonlight with him and pat his hand when he began to warm toward her, and say: Not yet, Brent dear, give me a little more time. Now she would say: Never! She would be strong enough now!

She gained in this sort of strength. She cried the word *Never* over and over to herself, practicing it.

Her rebellion reached its peak one Sunday night with the storm outside. She was to play the organ at the church. The preacher called and said she need not come: it would probably be no use. He would go, but only to call off the service, for the River was rising so fast and all the creeks . . . But she told him: I'll come, in case anybody wants to stay and

sing. Then she added with irony lost on him: Or pray for the water to go down. Recalled to duty, he said: Well, of course we could gather together for one hymn and one prayer.

She started out walking, for she wanted to feel it: she wanted to get wet and cold, but 'make weather' in herself against all discomfort. Not just excitedly to do this, but steadily, in the calm, sure way he did it. But she was excited: Tonight, tonight, she kept thinking as she walked, tonight I'm really being strong enough for anything. She walked steadily, however, right through the storm, not shivering, with face up, taking the rain, looking into the lightning. If once she could break through a certain shrinking—not just make a gesture, but do a deed, walk three miles in a storm, not frighten or chill, or wonder however she was going to get back! The requirements were inner as well as outer; both were one tonight, all was one. . . . Tonight, tonight! She could not get to the church soon enough to play that organ! Music was in her, not just little tunes, but music! How she would crash into it when she got there! One hymn, one prayer, the preacher had allowed her. She would make that one hymn say everything. Don't make the waters go down, let them rise, only give me strength to deal with them!

At the church, the preacher met her.

I'm sorry I let you come, he said, almost shaking with all his anxieties: We really cannot stop even for one song and prayer. The creeks are all rising, and anyway no one is here but Drake Parker.

But, of course, he!

She pushed by the preacher, saying with wasted irony: Where two or three are gathered together, you know!

Yes, yes, he said. But really—wisdom is part of—of wor-

ship. The creeks are up, I'm afraid my way back is already cut off.

But she had to get to that organ, she had to!

Just one hymn, she begged, and pushed on into the church.

He was dismayed: But, Miss Lutie! How are you to get back? I've come on horseback, I cannot see you safely home.

Now a voice came from inside the church room where she was trying to go.

— I came in a rig, I'll see Miss Lutie home—safely.

But, but, but! the preacher fairly sputtered.

Safely, Drake repeated, I said safely.

She just stood looking up the aisle, toward the organ, thinking only: If I could play just a few notes!

What decided the preacher? She did not know. Perhaps a crash of thunder that was so loud that it left nothing senseless in herself but those words: If I could play!

In the silence following the tremendous sound, Drake's voice came more clearly: And I'll be responsible, too, for turning out the lights.

She just went on up the aisle now, toward the organ. There, however, something penetrated her single intentness upon playing it. Their being alone, the preacher gone. This seemed to strike him, too; for he reached up to pull down the lamp and put it out. But then her desire to play the organ claimed her again.

Oh, please! she begged. Let me play just one hymn.

He had the lamp on the level of his face. It illumined his great, dark, seeing eyes, and a smile that was coming into them.

— You want powerfully to play that organ tonight, don't you?

Yes, she said, I want powerfully to do just this.

— Well then, just give him time to get out of hearing.

Then go and do it. As janitor I wont put the light out just yet.

He left the lamp hanging low and went down the aisle to the vestibule. In a flash of lightning he saw what he was looking for. He turned back, taking the aisle now in a few strides, chuckling.

— He's out of hearing, so go to it. I want as powerfully to sing as you want to play. Let's go!

There was gayety—the first she had ever felt in him. He came on up to where she was, lifted her off her feet—as off that fence!—and plumped her down upon the soft cushioned seat before the organ.

We've got five minutes, he said. What'll it be?

She caught it now, his gayety.

— Oh, anything with glory in it, simple glory.

He was running through a hymn book.

— Glory? Where did you pick that up? Out of the storm?

She began to pump and pull at stops.

— Yes, out of the storm. It is all power and glory outside.

He stopped looking in his book to look—at her, closely, bending in a way he had, with single intentness.

See here, he said, you are a different girl from the one I had to give my sweater to. You've gotten used to weather, seems like.

She began to go through the book herself.

— Yes, I'm not so shivery as I was.

I notice, he said, that you didn't go South with them. However did you manage to hold out against Brent's mother?

She started through the book a second time.

— I don't know. Maybe she thought I'd get frozen out if I stayed. Anyway, I made a kind of bargain with her. I said if she would just give me this winter, I'd make up my mind, positively.

He crushed his book on the finger he was holding between its pages.

The winter, he said, is about over.

— Yes, and I've made up my mind.

He opened the book to the page held.

Good, he said in a low voice: Good, either way, really to make up your mind and keep it.

She saw that the book was trembling in his hands.

Either way, he repeated. And I want you to know, I don't think less of you if . . . You see, I know the temptation: I went through it myself. There was a short time when I thought I couldn't do without the old man's name and his money. Both were offered me, same as they have been offered you. We've had the same temptation. This is the understanding between us.

His hands trembled so that he almost dropped the book.

Deuce take it! he laughed. I'm as nervous as the preacher.

She smiled up at him: Not for the same reason, though?

— No! Not about the storm or the creeks or your getting home safely. Just about someone going through the same thing that stood before me. And a woman—you!

— Why not me?

— Oh, I don't know. Because you are so small, I reckon, and were so shivery at first. It's a thing to make a man tremble to find a woman that real.

These are strange words to say to me, she hardly more than whispered: I've been just about the least real woman in the world.

Reality's a thing you don't begin with, he said. It is what you grow into, beyond the last way of evading it. But let's sing. What are you looking for?

She said the first hymn that came into her mind: On

Christ the Solid Rock . . . I think that will prevail against the storm, don't you?

She went through the index for the third time.

— Here it is, page four-ninety.

— It isn't in this book. I'll look over your shoulder.

So she began to play, and he to sing—while, outside, rain beat against closed shutters, slopped over eaves, poured in roaring streams from the drains that were working, soaked through the old bricks of the walls as dampness. And lightning flashed brokenly through the slats of the shutters, and thunder ripped the air open of all sound it contained.

'In every rough and stormy gale,' they sang to outsound the storm, 'My anchor holds . . .'

He closed the book abruptly at the end of the second verse.

Miss Lutie, he said with a light mockery of respectability, We must be going, or the preacher will be right, we wont get home tonight.

And he drew down the chain of the light above the organ, putting it out.

* * *

Outside, they found his horse all but plastered against the wall of the church for protection. The seat of the rig was soaked, but she took it without a shiver for the cold. He took a blanket from under the seat.

— Where would you like your comfort, over or under you?

Over, she said, I've already taken the seat at its worst.

So he put it over her as he swung into the rig beside her.

— But what of yourself? Here, you must share it.

It was just a piece of a blanket, but she tried to stretch it across him too.

I don't need it: I'm impervious to weather, he said. Time

I like to be out most is when it is raining. That's when I always plant my seeds. I like rain to drill them into the ground for me. Keep it all for yourself—you're on the windy side.

She was indeed; the wind was a sheet of rain on her cheek.

Here, he said, moving as far as he could to his side: Slide up against me. Put your head down under my arm as I drive and cover yourself over with that blanket.

Snuggle, he commanded, under that blanket and against me. Don't be afraid. Good heavens, Lutie! What are two human beings for, in such weather, but to comfort each other?

All right, she said, with voice muffled under the blanket and against him: I'm under. But what of yourself?

I told you, he said. But anyway you're keeping me warm and dry as far as you reach.

They rode through the first wash of creek over the road. The water rolled into the rig. He whistled.

— What'll the Branch itself be like if this is a sample of it?

She peeped at the road and the night and the storm that were one before them. She could see nothing, but she could feel the way closing before them. And when, just after they had crossed the three planks of a bridge over the next culvert, she heard a crash behind them, she knew that their retreat was cut off, too: they were caught between two crossings. They knew this together. He stiffened, she clutched at his arm.

We may not make it, he said, and his voice trembled.

Well, at least, she murmured, we can stand still, can't we? We are safe enough where we are, between them.

— Safe from the water, yes. But the water is the least of it.

She had not yet thought of the thing in his mind, that the preacher had put there, with his kind of nervousness. She tried to meet it lightly: Oh, if you mean what people will say . . .

I do mean that, he said shortly. What people, beginning with the preacher, ending with Brent's mother, not to mention your own!

She retrenched to the unavoidable: But how could we help it?

He lashed the horse suddenly: We should have gone at once; we shouldn't have stayed to sing . . . But maybe we can still make it.

She went into silence under the blanket. And if we can't? It is true, about people—because he—this is what he is thinking; this is what makes him so bitter. Brent's mother will be wild, yes; she has always hated him so, now she will think he is doing this for spite. Oh, we must make it for his sake. Dear God, for his sake but not for mine, for this will set me free as nothing else could: Brent's mother would never bother me any more. Oh, for my sake let the waters be over the road, but for his, let us make it!

I am thinking of you, he said, not of myself. I have so long ceased to care what anyone says of me. Or about anything at all that happens. Drouth or storm, night or day, life or death, all are of one piece for me, all is one whole. But for you it still makes a difference; life hasn't driven you so far as yet, to make all things one, and the whole tremendous beyond any one man's flutter about it . . .

But I was thinking of you, she interrupted. I don't care for myself, for what have I to lose? Only Brent. Have you thought of this? I have only Brent to lose!

He started in his seat: No, I hadn't thought of that. I was only thinking of your mother and your friends and the Lutie

you have been until tonight, the one who needs my sweater so, who teaches music . . .

Little tinkly tunes, she supplemented wryly.

— Little tinkly tunes, yes—and who goes around looking too pretty for any good use saving to feed the pride of a man like Brent, and to pacify him.

Here his scorn bettered him: Oh, I've heard about this, how she says of you, She is such a gentle pretty little thing she pacifies him.

But that isn't my fault, she battled with him. How she takes me isn't the way I am, it is only the way I look.

At her words his arm that had been above her to shield off the rain suddenly encircled her with the sudden grip of his hope.

— Lutie, isn't it? Are you as strong in yourself against them as you seem to be tonight? Strong enough—if the Branch should be up?

I've taken my strength from you, she said in a low voice. When I heard about you taking a stand against Old Hayes and his money, I took my first strength from that. If you will not care, I wont.

But he lapsed into the silence of another doubt, and removed his arm.

— But there is something beyond what people would say or think of. About me, the way I am. I am a son of the earth, Lutie; only in this way am I son of my father. You know how he felt about the Land, how it was really his only love and passion. I am like this, too; my life is dedicated to the land, as his was. I want only to restore all that my hand can touch. I know about the earth, same as my father; I know the living nature of it. What I aim to do with my life is to start buying land, not to possess but to restore. No woman could keep me from that. Even if I were to fall in love, the

land would have to come first. Not just the work of it, but the meaning. I can't quite explain this; you'd have to know somehow for yourself. But anyway, I've never lived with a woman in mind. For it is one thing to give up a name for yourself. It is another to have none to offer a woman.

They had reached the Branch. He drew up the horse shortly to his last words.

I will get out and see, he began. But the roar of the water drowned his words into their answer. The creek had taken the road; it was rushing by in a torrent that itself would have been impassable had not the water's depth prevented them.

It is worse than I thought, he said. We are not even safe here. We shall have to find higher ground and some other shelter.

He turned the horse to one side, to what appeared as a rise of the hill from the road.

If I remember the place, he said, there should be some rocks around, and a kind of cave.

He drove up into the darkness. She clung to him as the rig lurched and the horse slipped.

It is all strange, he said. Things are washed out, that were here before. We'd best keep on climbing until we can't go higher. Only so will we be safe from the rise of the creek.

So they climbed until the horse stopped for want of any farther place to go. Then Drake got out to see where they were.

On top of the cliff of the creek, he called back to her. And there is a kind of cave. Come along, and bring the blanket.

She crawled out of the rig, numb for a moment, and chilled to her heart; but she gathered force to go after him from the words she had so valiantly spoken, about being strong enough. He came back for her, reaching with his

hands through the blinding rain, calling her name with sudden tenderness: Lutie, Lutie! And then, catching at her arms, he ran on with her as in the church, half lifting her off the ground.

Their shelter was an overhanging rock suspended between two sounds, of rain beating upon it from above, of water roaring below. He drew her under it, into the curve of his arm, and held her lest she slip off the edge. It was narrow; one move, and they might fall into the rising water.

It is safe enough, he said, if we keep our backs against the rock and hold on to each other. Don't crouch. Sit down, try to be comfortable, I will hold on to you.

She moved within the grip of his arms.

But your legs are dangling over the edge, she said.

What else can I do with them? he laughed. Let me draw them up, there will be room for nothing else.

She subsided into a silence of words that became, increasingly, the noise of the storm. Until now this had been inward, an excitement of thought and feeling. Now all swung outward: even her feeling seemed to beat upon her from outside. Never had she known so far wind and rain or any elemental force. Below, the creek made one roar with wind and was one torrent with the rain. And through all—night—dark filtering. She knew all as one; nothing in her was personal or separate: what was dry was of the shelter of the rock, and what was comfortable was of this. And he was the rock where she leaned against him: he was this substance of the earth, through eons enduring. He was wholly known to her in what she knew of the storm.

She felt herself taking new experience somehow from him, which, alone, she might never have commanded: some single vast experience. To be with him was to find her place in the universe: it was a place he had himself made; he was like

someone who had gone before her and made a way for her to follow. She had been so little in herself until now, she could not but attribute to him this enlargement.

He spoke first, after a long silence, of the rain.

— Hear how it beats on the rock, he said. It comes like strokes falling on our heads.

And he gripped her hand under the cover they were sharing: What do you think the storm wants of us, Lutie, to beat so?

To make us remember it, she answered softly.

He echoed her word: Remember? But there will be nothing to remember. There will never be any other time for me than tonight.

‘For me,’ he had said, not ‘for us.’ She thinned for a moment to a sense of separateness in his words. But he drew her back to himself almost instantly with the question: How will it be for you, Lutie?

Why do you ask? she demanded of him. Do you not know?

But she did not have the courage of her question.

It is all but unbelievable, he said. That is why. Besides, I don’t think a thing is ever quite confirmed in oneself until one hears it spoken by another. I should like to hear you put it into words for me.

I can’t improve on yours, she said. There will never be any other time for me.

Now he said it: For us, Lutie?

— For us. This is eternity, Drake. This is all time happening at once, and all things.

Those are the words for it, he said. I have known it before, but only by myself. To find another, and a woman! And such a little one, and pretty, and the one who came to marry Brent . . .

— Don't say that. It was never really true of me. Not after . . .

— After what?

But she could not quite say it. He bent his head, put his cheek to hers and whispered: Not after you saw me in the field?

She whispered back: Yes. But I think it was the field as much as you; it was both of you together. It was how a man could be in relation to—to the earth. That sounds queerish, but that is what I mean.

I'm glad you included the field, he said, for my life is bound to it. That means you've seen me where I belong, you'd never do what I've been afraid of in a woman.

— What have you feared of women, Drake?

— That they would—narrow—and divide, somehow—me, from the whole to which I belong. Does that make sense to you, Lutie?

— Yes, now it does. Yesterday, perhaps not.

— Then, Lutie!

Joy began rising in his voice, but died almost at birth.

I forgot, he said, that we are not alone in this world of ours. I forgot all about places and people and names. About names, I forgot, and they make a difference. When you take a woman to be married to her, they ask about names, don't they? Who are you, and your mother and father?

— Names make a difference in time and place, Drake, but not in eternity.

— But yesterday was in time for you, Lutie, and what if tomorrow should become as yesterday, this night alone happening out of time for you?

Troubled by his doubt, he drew away from her, though his arms still held her safe from slipping.

I cannot answer that for you, she said after a long silence. Your faith in me seems to be mine in myself.

I suppose, he said distantly, that we'd better wait to be sure. It's asking a lot of you, I've so much less to offer than I'm asking.

She felt herself growing away from him, little and alone again, detached and futile.

Oh, Drake! she cried out, in her fear of losing what she had known through him: Save me from going back to what I was. Bind this night to the rest of my life. Don't let it happen out of time!

He came back in one rush: Lutie, do you mean this? You've got the courage to take a stand with me, nameless to the names people give everything, back to the past, face only to the future?

Your courage is mine, she sobbed from too much feeling.

Then, Lutie! His joy rose now to its full height and engulfed her with his arms. The rain on the rock above their heads drowned then, in a fresh, terrific beating, all else that he might have said. But it was itself this, all that was to be said between them that was beyond words, was all beat—in heart, mind, soul—beat of the world pulse of love: this the heartbeat of it; in the mind, one of recognition; in the soul, of remembrance. All one beat and a life-beat and of love, all-begetting and creating. They were as rock to the rain in the eons of time which the great world-beat would need to penetrate utterly and bring to its full change in creation; but at the same time they were as the water to it, yielding, enfilled and rising to a new content of substance and movement, overflowing all boundaries of previous feeling. And it was not passion: it was strong as the rock in him, cool as the water in her, and mighty in both beyond any one moment's demand of it. All that she had felt him capable of being, she

became herself, by the stroke of this rain, that was of love, that was of life in an endless divine procreation—of godhood into man, manhood into godlikeness again.

* * *

But in the morning—where this sound? in the drenched quiet and the sodden landscape of the day's returning. She grew frightened as they rode back the way they had come, frightened—of the way the world looked after the storm: trees stripped and white-wounded; roads gashed in the hills where none had been before, and the roads that had been, washed utterly away to their last rock; and all the still standing stalks of the winter beaten to the ground and riddled. The farms they passed were shattered of form remembered: here a fence was gone, there a chimney; one barn was bare of its door, another of its silo. Barnyards were swamped, leveled to house yards, and all were one mass, neither of earth nor of water. Where things had been thin-painted white—a house or a fence—the wet brown of the wood came through, giving the place the pocked look of a plague: the storm seemed to have happened not only without but from within, like an illness. Everywhere devastation, the familiar laid bare of an underlying strangeness that came as a skeleton to be felt beneath the living night they had just known.

The few miles back to the town, cutting across fields, took the whole morning, the horse tired to the way from his long standing, and the wheels of the rig thin to the deep mud of a road new-tracked across fields uncharted. She looked and looked and wondered: Where is the world I have known before? Where anything as I have known it?

She looked at Drake riding in silence beside her, and in a distance of himself to which, she saw, he would always re-

treat at times, into that 'whole' of which he had spoken. She wanted now, not to recall him, but to enter it, to discover for herself—was he also feeling the world destroyed around him? Or was he being familiar with all that was strange to her? He sat straight and hatless, tense toward the thing he was riding to, but strong for it and cleansed. There was such freshness about him—or was it only in the air and earth, water-soaked to its last dust-dryness? She breathed it in, feeling it to be one of a new life altogether. Still the very newness was her fright. He had been afraid that this tomorrow would return to yesterday. There was no danger of this! The whole familiar world of the past was destroyed with its time for her.

Drake, she said, reassure me. It is such a strange world.

It has been destroyed, he said, for us to create all over again. We are the first man and the first woman for the job.

She closed her eyes to the inner image.

That is fine! she murmured. Keep on talking like that.

He laughed, drew her into the circle of one arm and began half to sing and speak a chant of the world's genesis: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . . male and female created he them, and God blessed them, and God said . . . be fruitful . . . replenish the earth, and subdue it . . . And God said, Behold I have given you every herb . . . every tree . . .

Oh, unbearable moment of creation, can I bear it? The full being in these words that are his own being and mine in his! Origin of man, his origin, and so his ending. Only with your arm strong as the curve of that rock behind me can I for another moment know it!

Let us rehearse the ceremony in our own way, Lutie, he said. Say after me the words for it: I do feel all things as

you do, Drake, all time in one night, world created in world destroyed . . . say it, Lutie . . .

She sobbed it: I do, Drake, all . . . as you do!

* * *

Looking up to a blue sky in the silence that engulfed all the rest Lutie had to tell, I wondered at the blue and the bright sun and the heat, after such a storm, so much rain. I was so far living in what she had said and was silent of, and in Lutie herself saying it—lying there now, her lips moving to those words: I do, Drake, oh, I do!

She had no need to tell me: This is the night that now he knows only! I could go on myself with the rest: beat of hoof on his head, beat of rain on the rock! The rain, the rain, how it beats and beats upon the rock! What does it want of me, that it beats so? For you to remember, Drake! Remember? But there will be nothing to remember, there will never be any other time!

* * *

Dirk and Prue had come back; they were standing there, carrying the water together. I had to struggle back to their recognition. All women and all men in the world had become Lutie and Drake. When I did see Dirk as himself I wanted to rush and tell him, to cry confirmation to his yearning that was mine: It is true, Dirk, it is true. Here in Lutie and Drake is the story lived, and it is of love surviving all else, becoming all else . . . For it was this way for me in the moment: the whole earth was filling up with it—love, as of sun for earth, each leaf, each blade of grass in the moment receiving it. All was the giving and the receiving of love. Even the grass that was cut, that lay strewn all about us. This a gift of love, a love sacrifice—of earth to the life of animal and of man. What was the whole process but this: a giving and a transforming?

I could see now the second requirement: the transformation of the gift that was required of all love. In little Lutie lying there on the ground: in her face all of what she had told me, all the joy and the pain of her complete acceptance. And in the great figure of Drake Parker, coming now across the field, looking for her, only her . . .

I wanted to run to Dirk and say: We can believe it, for it has been lived, here in these two. Theirs is the immortal romance!

* * *

In the early evening, as they drove down the lane with the last load of hay that they took for the labor, Father stood beside me, watching them until the blue of their wagon and the yellow of the hay went home into the horizon of the summer day.

He sighed: They are immortal figures in the world's harvest, dwelling amongst us.

Yes, I said. And love is this harvest.

Love? Father repeated the word, though it was not exactly with question, only with contemplation. Yes! But I am afraid, less often than anywhere else does one find it between a man and a woman—great in this way, with the meaning of all else in it.

Still, I said, to find it there once is to find it.

Yes, he said again. Yes. And you, Jay, you are young enough. But I—I have only now to find it alone.

* * *

Before the month was over I had to go to see them. Lutie had asked me to come; but I was drawn in myself by their love—it was like a fulfillment to a want in myself, drawing me there. I called Prue, and she came up to go with me. It was her first ride since her return; but she insisted upon

taking the mare. Hilda was the next thing she had to ride through!

We had to go past Hayescroft on the way, the lower fields of it. Prue rode far ahead of me, not able to hold Hilda in to Lariat. (For Lariat was a different horse since the night of Prue's ride. I conquered him too far, she mourned. I'll have to be breaking me a new horse soon or take Hilda back.) I was glad to go slowly, for the night was hot, and I was lingering in thought of what Lutie had told me.

We had half a mile to ride passing Hayescroft. Almost at the beginning a Doberman caught scent of us and came snarling and running to the fence. Fortunately Hilda had already passed, and Lariat was calm to the annoyance, ignoring it. He seemed to be trusting that a gate we must pass would be closed, as I was not. I rode nervous before a possible choice to be made between keeping on a frightened horse and dismounting to a vicious dog.

I had decided on Lariat by the time we reached the gate. But there—I saw that it was closed and that—a woman was leaning against it, and gripping the two center pickets, as if holding them together. The dog in running for the gate almost knocked her over. Now I was close enough to feel, if not actually to see in the twilight, her hands tightening their grip: to feel taut joint and raised vein, the whole body supported by the hand, here in this lonely immensity of field, in the hot night coming on, one with the running ferocity of the dog. Then the thought came: It is his sister! And I pulled Lariat a little closer to the fence, in spite of the Doberman, though he was in the moment trying to squeeze under the pickets of the gate. I had to venture closer, for I was thinking: In her I might catch a glimpse of him!

It was then she cried out, voice startled from her with fear:

— Don't come any closer, don't stop. I have no control of the dog!

I jerked Lariat back into the road.

Good evening, I said, and went on. But just in that flash I had seen—something of that boy in the picture grown into the image of a woman, all sensitivity in the face sharpened and narrowed to a woman's use of it. I had seen that the form was overtall, with shoulders and breast somewhat overhanging the lower frame; and the bearing proud, however bent in the moment to fear: the face, one torture of pride and fear. I had seen! And I had caught an impression that rode on with me, the whole way to Lutie's. Night: night gathering for her, certain hot dark forces—of a man's passion in madness, senseless, and sterile.

I was sorry to come to Lutie bearing this impression; but I could not shake it from me. I had to tell her as she came out to meet me—a little timid, it seemed, about seeing again the one to whom she had given so much of herself and Drake.

Lutie, I said, I just passed Brent Hayes' wife, I just saw what would have happened to you if . . .

She shuddered: Yes, I know. I have seen her there too and have thought, It might have been I. For I have heard Brent is getting worse; far from being pacified by marriage, he is made almost demoniac at times.

Night, I murmured. She is horribly afraid of the night. And the dog, he is this to her. She stood there, all one shudder of night and dog.

Lutie slipped her arm now through mine as we walked to the house.

How vivid things like this are to you! she smiled. I reckon that is what makes you a writer. But it is true enough, all one shudder. I don't know how much longer she can stand it.

I've heard that she is trying to get Kirtley to come and stay with her, she is so frightened.

I stopped to the name: Kirtley? But, Lutie, El Farm is his, and he loves it, and yet cannot come; he is not free to come. That is why he sent us!

Lutie looked at me a little blankly: Well, I don't know, Julie. I just heard—she is having such trouble with the land; Brent has no sense of it whatever, and really, something terrible is happening to it. Almost I feel as if Drake ought . . .

No, she interrupted herself. No, not that. But just to give you an idea of what he might do—Drake would be able to claim it all. It is in Old Hayes' will, that Drake at any time can have as his legal inheritance any or all of what is now Brent's. If they weren't sure of Drake as Drake is of himself, they'd have to live in fear of his claim, always. As it is . . .

We had come up to the porch where Drake was sitting, with Prue not far from him, and talking . . . He did not know Prue, but he did know what she was talking of—horses and the land. Sometimes he answered or just said a few words out of himself; but mostly he was silent. We sat down too, on the floor of the porch, and watched the moon rise, warmly gilded at first, but cooling, as it climbed, back to silver. We said little, sitting there; but I felt some tremendous contentment in silence, some unutterable fullness of communication that came from Drake where he sat, face lifted to the moon, eyes widely open and yet body and head and breath as still as if he were sleeping. Lutie had told me that Drake's silences were indeed full: that sometimes after one of them he would begin talking to her, words of a vision he had in it, or a knowledge given him to complete knowledge he had. She was writing down what he said; she had

his consent, he had said: 'Write it, it should be common knowledge.' I wondered now what thought might be gathering to his quiet reception of it, projected where he was out of time, and the limitations of time that held others short of the mind's own full revelation. And I thought of the great difference between this state he was in and Brent's idiocy: how Drake had somehow paved the way of thought to this threshold, across which his mind had been projected, so that it was not a disconnected state of madness as it might have been, in another man—in Brent; how these so-called visions of his were seen only from the next step taken from what in ordinary life and sanity he saw, striding forward always in his thought, past the last boundary that had stopped other men. And striding forward also with his life, so that he could live now in the thing forwardly seen, feel and take life from it and give this to another—even to me, stranger to him, and just sitting here in the shadow of his presence. Even to me! so that I felt all enlivened, with a wholly new, inward excitement to life. Life of mind, yes; but life of mind living as the heart lived—thought with a beat in it, with warmth, and its own movement. Living thought, or thought given life somehow. Tonight, more than ever before, I felt all life not within but outside, giving itself to the soul of man, to my own soul, but not wholly given. Only a small measure within; infinitely more streaming toward the human vessel that had not been enlarged enough to receive it. Drake Parker, sitting there, removed life in this way—gave it direction of streaming in from outside; the way he sat there, receptive, created the impression. I felt all muted of being to the little I could myself accommodate, in the small extension of my thought, the feeble intensity of my soul.

Muted—all the way home, riding with Prue—so that I could say nothing of all I wanted to say about Drake. And

Prue? It was not so strange for her as for me to be muted in this way: Prue rode in a silence not Drake's, but her own. I could feel that she was well under way riding in herself what I on this night was only entering: that road in time to the timeless; and in the self toward the selfless.

Hilda got ahead of Lariat shortly; most of the way I rode alone but not feeling so. For now beyond my last uncertainty of myself in connection with this place, I knew: Old Hayes was father of something in me too, as Drake Parker was son of it. Under the unbroken, unfolding scroll of the stars above this continuous land, all identities simplified: were felt to be in infinite duplication but not difference. One life and one time, I thought as I rode; time and life are infinitely divisible, but yet all are contained in one great circle of light and shadow. One night! Drake's mind has conceived this, and his life is his thought's conception. One World-Night and one World-Day. Wherever there is a man who knows this, there the knowledge lives to be given another. So is it here, and I have come to it. As myself, apart from Father. One year, as one day and one night! And now? This time of year was the time of my life. Time of the harvest. But the thought did not bring its first sadness. Since seeing Drake I could realize beyond this: a truth of the earth and of myself: death of grasses but the seed garnered—somewhere deep in myself—for another year's fruition.

Prue did not even ride back to me to say good night. And she forgot what horse she was on, riding Hilda home, instead of coming back for Lariat! There was some confirmation of my own experience in this forgetting of hers—even of what horse was under her. Turning my way alone, I felt how good it was for her to forget herself in Drake, as it was for me. How good for myself not to know what seed it might be that I had garnered, but to ride cherishing the unknown,

not fearful of it but fully content, with an unspeakable fullness.

* * *

All through this night, that was as light as day in my room, with the moon catching its angle and flooding my bed and the table beside it, I could not sleep. There was so much to say to someone, and I had not had a chance to say it—to Prue. I lay burdened with the treasure of something known, of Lutie and Drake and their love, and of Drake himself as he had sat there in the moonlight on the step. I felt that I had to pass it on to another—to him.

Getting up at last, I began writing, just by moonlight, just to relieve myself of the burden: 'Dear Captain Hayes: About Drake and Lutie, do you want to hear it? Has anyone written you yet about them? From what you said about Drake in your letter, it seems that you would want to know . . . especially about Lutie and their love. It is surely something at El Farm that you would want to feel here. For it is created out of what is potential—what was potential in Old Hayes. Yes, I think he must have sired even this . . .'

So through the night, until there were ten pages. Of course I would not send it, it was so badly written, just by moonlight. 'P.S. I'll probably never send this, but if I do, please excuse the writing, for I've done it only by moonlight. Did ever moons shine so brightly anywhere else? Or is it just the moon of July, of high summer, before it gets hazy or flushed? Anyway, if I should send this, please excuse . . . It is only because I had to tell someone about Drake and Lutie—myself perhaps—it is all so incredible.'

In the morning I could make it out; only here and there was it faint. But should I? I had to! I had to tell someone about them, and only he could understand. Only for him had the story been told me!

AUGUST

Death at the Harvest

August burst now with a ripeness of fruit upon us, days and nights hot, sun and moon red with the coloration of the apples. I was recalled to Cordelia at her window, in seeing from mine—the orchards. The trees all boughed heavily, limbs breaking, and fruit lying everywhere prodigal on the ground, unwanted even by the birds who were surfeited. Cordelia's harvest! It had come safely, one year in ten for fruit, one in her life for Cordelia.

I had not seen her since Prue's wedding day, and then only as a lifeless image of herself, her thought and being elsewhere, back at home, in the orchard, among the apples. She had talked that day with her neighbors, with toneless politeness: about Prue, the occasion, the cakes. To me she had whispered once in the afternoon, with the single flare of her intensity. The apples—they are forming perfectly, we will harvest them! But I had been too intent upon Prue at the time to share any other intensity. The time at hand was Prue's; not even Cordelia and her apples could claim it from her! Cordelia seemed to know; she moved away from me, into a loneliness of her hope, and its necessity. But she did not need anyone any longer to share it: the apples were enough, she could live now only in the apples.

But now I began to feel her again in them: I could command no other thought or image, all became Apples and Cordelia. It was almost an obsession—the more so because the fruit in the heat permeated the air everywhere with its stinging sweetness. Nights were more penetrated by it in their stillness than days: following me in sleep, it gave shape and taste of apples even to my dreams.

One day I came upon her, at the fence between the old orchard and her place. Having eaten hungrily of her own with her eyes, she was consuming ours in the same way when I saw her. I told her how she looked, and she laughed. She was flushed with excitement, given the roundness of flesh by color, without having gained any. I asked her over to look at the young orchard; and we went up and sat under one of the trees for a long time, almost the afternoon through, while we talked—of the apples, and all that was connected with them—not only her hope, but a fear taken in them also, of her mother. Slowly a picture formed of what she said: it moved and became a scene enacted, between her mother and herself—of which the apples were only a symbol.

* * *

She had not meant to tell her mother about the fruit, lest something happen to it, and she would have to be told otherwise. But a few days ago, with the harvest assured, her hope a certainty . . .

Mamma, the fruit is fine, she told her. We're going to have rare luck with the apples. You'll see, Clive was right to put out such fine varieties; you'll see!

Quit saying that word to me blind, her mother tapped with her cane. Come any harvest Clive Aylor reaps, I'll have to see it myself to believe it. You're just saying this, you're

still trying to say he is good for something besides his fine talk and fancy love-making.

Cordelia flushed to that. How did her mother know that his imagination was of love, too, as it was of the apples? All about Clive was this, imagination—one glow and grace of it, in which, through all her suffering, she had lived, beyond any conception of living in her mother's life. Come any harvest Clive Aylor reaps, her mother said . . . But such a harvest had come, her mother was but blind to it! It was not this one of the apples, no: even if the apples still were to fail, this other harvest would stand, yield enough for their life, hers and Clive's together. Cordelia was herself seeing it now for the first time, through her mother's blind words. This harvest of love in her life!—of love, the imagination of love. Of this Clive was capable, both of creating and of maintaining it, so that even if she were to die before knowing the outer harvest—success with the apples—she would have this fruition in her life—of which not even yet was the seed planted in her mother's.

Only now she knew it!—looking down upon her mother, all life hardened in her to bones and confined to them so that there was nothing else, no other yield, no glow or grace, nothing cast backward to the past in memory, or forward to the future with faith. Only the bones of life there, only that part that had hardened and become substance. Nothing to survive when the bones must die: was this not her mother's fear, that kept her living? Nothing to survive, I have not lived my own survival!

Why don't you say something? her mother rasped. What are you thinking about, standing there so still?

I'm thinking, Cordelia said, about the harvest, what Clive planted, that has come to fruit.

Oh, the fruit! her mother snapped. I'll believe that when Clive Aylor counts into my hand the rent he owes me. Don't need to go bringing me an apple if they ripen. What I want to feel is the money.

Again Cordelia saw through what was blind in her mother's words. Again: But it wont be in money, or even apples, but in something neither you nor I nor anyone will ever be able to hold in our hands!

She was frightened in a new way, about what she saw: about the inner, the elusive, the unmaterialized nature of her own life's harvest; about love—only the gesture of it made in life, all the rest a faith, a promise, infinite and eternal; about the way all things suddenly were enlarging and abstracting themselves, out of this last form and substance they had for her—of the apples. Frightened, of what she saw through her mother's blindness.

What are you doing? Don't stand there so still! her mother shrilled into her silence. And let me tell you something, my girl. Don't you count on this Clive-man of yours, or on the fruit. Both are promises, nothing but promises. I tell you, there's nothing in the end but what you can manage to hold onto, with your hands.

Now she held up her hands, the crooked bones. Cordelia saw in them the resemblance to her own. Only mine are not crooked for grasping and holding! No, this is not the resemblance. Only labor has bent mine, and prayer, the unspeakable prayer! No, no, it must not be for me as it is for her, not just bones, dear God, not life clutching to them forever!

With your hands! her mother screamed. Nothing behind and nothing ahead, only what you have in your hands in the minute, that nobody can get and take from you.

And she turned to Cordelia, beating the air with her cane.

— You! Living on promises! Believing in love, that he

married you for love, not the land. You'll see, now he is deceiving you about the apples. Mark my word, something will happen.

Suddenly Cordelia was unable to bear it: she felt her mother's will and her hate and her single suspicion laying hold of the apples to prevent somehow their perfection.

Don't say it, she cried, or something will happen! You'll bring it about, just by disbelieving and hating and wanting to prove Clive wrong again.

And she went running from the room, clutching her thin breast with her hands through the shred of dress upon it that felt—as skin—and her hands as her mother's hands upon her, tearing at her heart where the glow and the grace was . . .

* * *

Cordelia, speaking of this, clutched again at her heart.

Oh, Miss Julia! she cried. This is my fear now, that hate can destroy what love has created; and her disbelief—all I believe in! It is not for the apples themselves, it has all become so much more!

But look, Cordelia, I said, the apples are ripe and ready; nothing can happen to them as apples or symbol.

She looked, and took hope afresh from the sight; took it directly, as life itself; somehow took life from the apples. Then she got up, and her hands dropped from her breast, and she stood firmly, and with certainty.

Yes! she breathed. I have only to look to see. But now I must get back to her. I had to go away for a while, to find again what she takes from me.

I reached up and picked one of the apples, and gave it to her.

As a pledge, I said.

She held it lovingly: Yes, a pledge, from life to—death.

Now she turned and looked up the hill to where—Old Hayes . . .

Would you mind, she said, if I went up for a moment and put this on his grave? I think he would like to know that Clive has brought them through, the first harvest of the young orchard. He lost faith in Clive; that is why I should like . . .

She wanted me to come, too; so we climbed the hill, though it was very hot and she was tired. When we crossed the stile I had to help her; she was trembling and panting for breath.

Now she knelt before the stone without a grave, and placed the apple against it.

Old Hayes, she said softly, Clive did it; really he did it. Planted and cared for them, from sprout to fruit. And it isn't all Clive has done—oh, believe me, not all! There is something else, Old Hayes, not just of the land; but I think you know it now; by now you must know it!

She got up, eyes shining with this something re-known. For a moment she stood, looking out from the yard and back, down at the graves, then up to the trees. August had gathered all its stillness to this spot. It was warm here, as high as it was; and no wind was blowing. Life stood still in the trees, as death lay below them. Still. One could hear one's heart beat against the stillness. For me there was neither memory nor promise in the moment; all was in suspense between them. But for her—she entered the stillness and knew it within, as I did not. Her need for it drove her, where I held back. And a smile of a great peace came into her face as she said:

— It is so lovely here, I wish I might lie here at the last. I would not take up much room, and I would feel such peace here as I have never known, living.

She sighed for her need now to leave it.

— But I must be getting back to Mamma. She'll be beating the air with her cane and calling . . .

Standing on the wall, she looked out, and down, and up again.

— Maybe Old Hayes would be willing to have me here, since Clive has proved himself kin by having such a harvest.

Then she stepped down off the wall, without my help, and walked on—straighter—as if she had found life here—where—this time it was failing me. For I, now I began to take her inner fear of—hate against love, mistrusting against faith, and bones against what might survive them. It was in the air: death to all that had been; death, in fruition. I had to pick up an apple on the way down and carry it, as once Zayda had carried that stone—for the warm, living feel of it!

She felt how it was with me, she said: I'm afraid I've gotten rid of my fear by giving it to you. I shouldn't have told you, but somehow I wanted someone to know how suddenly I felt, about Clive and all—even without the apples.

My sadness, I said, is only in the year that is passing so quickly for me. This is my first harvest too, Cordelia, it is the first year I have ever seemed really to live.

But you will stay on, she said. You will find some place around here to stay on, wont you?

— Perhaps. But it wont be El Farm, no other place can be. So much lives here, as nowhere else. . . . Like yourself, Cordelia, you and your apples!

How far you do live in other people! she smiled. You've never been strange to me, not for one moment. You have been as myself. I told Clive, she is as myself when I talk to her.

But I think, Cordelia, I answered with that new truth

come to me, that all of us somewhere inside find such likeness when we find our true selves.

I thought of the Letter; I went silent, thinking of it: how I had come, how the Letter had brought me, to such finding.

* * *

Riper and riper now—some of the trees to golden lusciousness, others to green tartness, and others to a reddened mellow; but all full-bodied, round or oval, without bruise or blemish. They began to pick in their own orchard, he and Cordelia, she kneeling to the baskets, he in the tree. He was exultant, she—reverent.

This was his exultance: Now let folk say what they would of the past and his failures. He would match everything they said against him with these apples. They would easily be the finest grown in the county. He would show them at Harvest Home, end of the month. Folks would think he was a Hayes for certain then, they would say: Pity Old Hayes couldn't see them. He had smiled at Cordelia's fancy, in going up to the Yard, to take an apple to Old Hayes, and to tell him about them. But he could understand now why she had done it! As he picked, he was saying over and over, somewhere in himself: See, Old Hayes, they are as good as you could have grown yourself, or Drake either—yes, good as Drake's!

When he thought of the apples in terms of money, it was only for Cordelia's sake. Just to have grown them was enough for his own satisfaction!

After a few days of picking their own, they came over to start on ours, that we might not miss the height of the market. They began in the older orchard, in the row by the fence-line of their own place. We would have helped, but we saw that they wanted it strictly on shares—half what

they picked for their labor. So we let them work alone, that they might make all they could at it. We could see, also, that they wanted to be alone in their joy.

So they started picking. (Afterward he told me how it was, every bit of it, vividly remembered.)

He called from the trees as he picked, down to the ground where she was packing the fruit in baskets.

— Now, Cordy, a nurse at five a week, even if the Old Lady lasts the winter. And the washing machine— But why don't you just send the washing out, and be rid of all the bother? Say, at two a week . . .

— Oh, it wont be that much, Clive. One and a half and the soap. But no, that would amount to more in the end. In a year's time it would pay for the washer.

— Yes, but you'd be doing the work yourself and have all the muss. And we're going to live this year ahead of us as if it were all the time there is to be!

— Now, Clive, you've been living that way all along.

— Yes, I know. But you need this year, and the Old Lady can't hold out much longer.

She sighed: You've been killing Mamma off for the past ten years. But we've got to count on her outliving us all.

Clive scoffed the idea from the tree's fullness, with the apples yielding in ripeness to his hands.

— Folks are not that different from fruit. Comes a time they rot and fall. Not that I want the Old Lady to die . . .

She sighed again, deeply, deeply: But you do, Clive, you do; and so do I at heart. She is so useless lying there; and, to keep alive, she drains the life out of me. Sometimes I feel her taking it, actually taking it, sucking it out of my veins. Sometimes at night, when I can't sleep . . .

— Now, now, Cordy, it will be different when you don't have to tend to her yourself, when you get to lie down in

the afternoons. Oh, Cordy my girl, everything will be different from now on!

He bent, aiming an apple at her basket.

Don't throw it! she cried. It will bruise!

She caught it as it came, holding both hands. It was so large that it filled up the cup of them.

Oh! she said, and began weeping for joy: It is so wonderful, having this harvest at last, all this fullness of fruit, this perfection. It does justify things, somehow, Clive, all you aimed at from the start.

We'll set out as many more next year, he said. We'll be known all over this part of the state for our apples. When the Old Lady goes and the Farm is ours, we will name it. What shall we call it?

— Apple Orchard Farm. No, that is no name at all. Let me see: Golden Harvest Farm—how is that?

It is a nice picture, Clive mused, but it doesn't speak well. Still, written, it might be all right. But let's put Old Hayes' name to it, and make it worthy of him. Hayes' Apple Farm—something like that.

He came down from the tree, having finished the top; and he stopped to look at her bent to the basket, lovingly arranging the apples in round rows, reddest side up, and all the stems pointing inward.

— Cordelia!

He fell on his knees and leaned and kissed her, and murmured: Your lips are sweet again, and full. You've taken the fruit into you.

I love it, she said, holding an apple to her breast: I love it as life!

He said: I'm jealous of the fruit. Love me, Cordy!

She leaned to him and kissed him.

— There. Was that as good as the one you took yourself?

— It was better. Things given are always so. Cordy, you're looking so much better today; your face is as red as the apples.

I'm hot for one thing, she laughed. But, as for that, I am feeling better, almost too much so.

— How do you mean, too much so?

— I'm feeling excited, Clive, over this harvest. My very blood is running fast to the goodness of it, coming at this time in our lives when we need it so. It seems to be God's own goodness that I have only just discovered, almost too late in my life to know it.

— Have you not known it before with me, Cordy?

— Yes, Clive, yes. That is how first I came to know it. Only, now it has grown beyond both of us, it is outside all that used to be as a shadow upon it—tiredness, anxiety, pain. Now there is nothing that can happen to it, it is just goodness—in the ground, in the air, in the clouds and the sun. And somewhere, in some mind, for the needs of men.

Finishing her basket, she let her hands rest idle for a moment. She looked up to the foliage of the tree with fully revealed worship.

— Clive, my need has gone up like a prayer to God, beyond all speaking of it to Him or anyone. At night it has risen from me lying in bed; I have felt it going. I think this must be what prayer really is, the burden of the soul lifting itself to its own relief. A burden, taking wings, suddenly growing them! Need drives you to God, Clive; it drives you straight to God. Now I understand those words: Blessed are they who mourn, who hunger, who thirst . . .

She covered her face with her hands, and wept softly.

Clive from his knees begged: Don't, Cordy, don't! I didn't know it had gone so deep with you, I thought you were happy enough with me.

She lifted her hands from her wet face to look tenderly at him.

— With you, Clive, yes, with you. But beyond love I have needed—strength or rest; and my need for them has been my prayer.

Then she lifted her hands again to the tree.

— And this has been my answer, this harvest of the years! It is in the tree, Clive, God's very voice is in the tree saying: Here it is, Cordelia, here is your rest!

She remained in this position for a long moment as one transfixed. Where before such gesture of her hands had been one of supplication, now, visibly, it was one of receiving something that poured as light upon her. Her hands were relaxed now, fingers bent and still tense, but at rest within their stiffness and pain. As she stood on, her Cordelia-identity seemed to fall away from her, and she became only as a soul without name or form, except that of its need. And this was for rest and release.

He saw her now out of all relationship—to himself and every other: he saw her in some absolute way, related to no one but—God. And this meant God as some inherent presence, some intimate connection beyond the last intimacy of his own deepest feeling of her. He took fright from what he saw—that no longer bore the identity of Cordelia-and-I . . . And he called her name in his fright, over and over, as if to recall her to herself and so to him.

— Cordelia, Cordelia!

Her hands fell from their worship. She smiled, from a distance; but began coming toward him again.

To the fruit! she cried, and bent to begin on another basket: Go right above me so I can see you, Clive; but don't drop any.

He hesitated a moment; but then, reassured by her gay-

ety, climbed lithely to the crotch of the tree, with a sack slung over his shoulder. Now and again, as he picked, he looked down upon her bent head. It still glinted gold here and there in the sun, though for the most part it was a mousy tan-gray, thinned almost to baldness. She seemed more colorful in all ways today. He reflected upon what she had said, and saw how its intensity was in the way she looked. And he took fresh excitement from it. How deep she went! Deeper by far than he went in himself; and beyond what he had himself been able to touch in her. He had felt her gentle and sweet, more submissive than responsive, more willing than having will. Never had he stirred such passion as this for the apples, or such gesture as that of her hands raised to the tree. Yet he was thrilled by them as if they were meant for him: he felt included in what she had said—somehow identified as himself, in it.

A burden growing wings, lifting itself. Up here in the tree now, pondering these words, he felt a deep stir within, as if something were being lifted. And it was not just a burden of the flesh that money from the harvest would relieve, but something more. It was a life-stir, like that in love; it was vital and organic with life like that, but it went deeper and farther—a stir to no personal end or satisfaction: to something lying illimitably beyond these. It was a lifting! From all weight and boundary. He began to grow light with it, up here in the tree: all became for a moment as substance of air. Even the apples lost weight in his hands: they were color and odor blowing through form, without weight. And his own hands were just so much rapture known in touching them. A burden growing wings! Her words were creating their experience for him! He took fright from the sudden ecstasy and gripped an apple, as if to bring tangibility back to it; and he looked down, to make sure he had not lost

familiar sense of her. She was sitting quietly, leaning against the trunk of the tree. So tired, having a little nap in the sun. With his sack full now, he swung around on the other side of the tree, to go down, that he might not waken her. All began to take on flesh again; but still it was one permeated with color and odor, with the fullness and sweetness and goodness—these qualities felt as themselves. Air blowing through the tree bore down upon him, laden with the odor of the fruit: odor that was taste, sweet but astringent, wine in an etheric state, before it becomes liquid.

He did not lose the sense wholly even when his feet touched the ground and he knelt to put the apples into the basket for her. He could not see her from here, for all the apples that surrounded her—in piles and baskets and branch over her head, hanging low to it. He filled his basket softly not to waken her; then reaching for another he could see her. And he saw . . .

Cordy, he whispered. And called her name again and again: Cordy, Cordy! His voice rose to the realization until he cried into the distance of heaven: Cordelia!

— No, she is not, she is only . . . Cordy, wake up, my girl, you're shirking! This is the harvest of a lifetime, we've got to glean it—all before sundown. Cordy, wake up! See! It isn't so, you're just sleeping. Wake up and fill your basket, I've brought you a sack full for it . . .

He almost persuaded himself. He leaned, and held out one of the apples huge with the goodness to be felt. But as he did so a certain difference came to his feeling of the fruit. It took on weight, growing heavier and heavier with its flesh; and at the same time his own body filled up with its old burden of flesh and bone. So heavy, the apple dropped from his hand just in front of her; and too, his hand fell . . . until it was upon her . . .

He drew back, faint, with blood ebbing away. He made another effort at persuasion, closing his eyes to the sight, grasping at reason: No, no, people don't die picking apples, they die in their beds. Cordy, wake up! People don't die in the afternoon, this is no time for dying. You can't do it—God can't do this . . .

But the weight, the weight! Beyond every thought and word it came to him: Death, as this weight, this dull inert heaviness. Life was—what he had known in the tree: wind blowing through Time; a breath, as of Spirit: odor, color, fullness, goodness—all wafting through form, filling it up but then passing. And this was death—the empty vessel, left empty, lifeless, for rotting.

He opened his eyes again, for some sight that would deny this feeling: for the image of life, at least, that she made sitting there amongst the apples. But now as he looked it was different. All life had gone also from the apples, taking color and odor and fullness and goodness . . .

He tried to rise, to overcome death laying hold of him. He looked to the tree as if to find a force left up there, that would hold him upright and living against this weight. He thought: If I do not stand now, I shall never stand again. Effort to rise was very effort to live . . .

On his feet now, though bowed still to the weight, thought began to gather to his simple realization. He must go for help or take her. Or leave her here forever amongst the apples?

— No, no, I must take her. But how? In my arms? But I am not able! She is so heavy, so heavy . . . I will go down to the weight, I will go down to it forever! And I could not be tender enough—her dear body!

Now for a moment, remembrance: Now she will never know . . . comfort of the mattress . . . but only the Old Lady, all bones for the feeling of it, the comfort wasted. But no,

God, no, this cannot be so, the Old Lady cannot be living while she . . .

With memory of the Old Lady he returned to the thought: And where take her? Not to the Old Lady! Not, not there, never there! But where else? To Hayes El! He would take her to Hayes El, to Old Hayes! He would take her with the apples, he would say: Here it is, my life's harvest . . .

But how take her? The distance, the weight, and himself not able. How? Now his answer came from outside, as his eyes fell upon the wheelbarrow they had brought with them, to carry the empty boxes and baskets. Another memory invaded him, but this one was warm and tender and living. When they were first married, when there was only themselves and their love—how they would play at their work in the garden with the barrow! He would lift her into it and make off with her. Sometimes he would run her aground, and then pick her up and hold her, laughing, and love her with all youth of love, all fresh sensation. If now he might keep the invasion long enough, live in the illusion, or claim it as the eternal reality of their being together, he would be able . . .

Still warm and tender and living in the memory, he wheeled the barrow toward her . . .

* * *

‘So he brought her up the lane in the barrow,’ I wrote, ‘he brought her home to Hayes El. At first when we saw them coming we thought—just playful, or maybe she is tired. We were all outside, Janet too. Zayda was the first to know . . . she ran to him just in time, as the illusion spent itself, and he broke to the weight and its knowledge. No one spoke, not even Janet. All were held bound by the sight: Janet with fear, Father with sadness, and I . . .

‘For me it was—vision of death. I saw the apples around her with sudden transparency: saw within the flesh, the fresh-formed seed; saw within the growth of one season, the living core of another. And in the apples I saw a likeness to all things living, in their process of eternal regeneration. In this—her life involved: the seed perfectly formed though the flesh was still young; core reached in her short lifetime, her need driving her to it. (I saw this as one sees without eyes, the mind given a penetration of its own.)

‘And out of the vision certain words resounded: Blessed are they! And they who mourn. Blessed Clive in his sorrow, and we sharing it, if some day it bring us to that gesture of her hands to the tree, that burden of her prayer, and its self-lifting . . .’

Then I wrote of how we buried her: ‘On the hilltop—Zayda said she was sure you would be willing, and that Old Hayes would want her there. They never took her back to the Old Lady—we kept her here. Zayda did everything, lovingly, without a shudder for death. Through her I was able to help—it was so sweet and gentle a service. Only its beauty brought tears, so poignant as to be pain.

‘We kept it all simple and lifelike, the way death is always treated, Zayda says, here at Hayes El. Windows open, and sun in, and people coming as they would on a living visit, bringing any flower or fruit. And just a song and a psalm and a few words of Scripture. Now when I tell you that Drake and Lutie came, and Lutie played and Drake sang—need I tell you any more? For myself, I did not break to death of love, but to love living. To the sight of Lutie at the piano, and Drake singing with that one memory he has—of that night in the church when she played and he sang. That, I thought, I could not bear.

‘And afterward—the gift of her to the earth, as Drake

gave his huge strength to the box as it went down. It was evening, the quiet and lovely time that she loved so. As they gave her to the earth it was—for me—like giving her to Old Hayes. And I thought: Is this the gate he could not pass—death survived in life, as she has survived it?

‘On the way down the hill again . . . I lived that way in August as I had in May. It was no longer green but purple-seeded. The dusk of the woods was thinning—there was no turn of color or fall of leaf yet, but a kind of pallor was upon them, and a shriveling: their summer breadth and depth were not there, they no longer made that dark balance for the cleared land. Time of fruition: the shrinking stalk, the open pod hanging limp to the flower or the seed, ready for falling. Not death yet, but the first contraction from the fullness of my memory of May.

‘I seemed again to be reading some living scripture of life and death from the earth itself, and from time moving in the year. But all words for it eluded me until today—when Clive came and spoke them! For today Clive came back, able to finish picking the apples.

‘He came—looking thinner than ever, more tired, but not strained: his face was almost at ease, relaxed from that center stroke of its features. It looked empty by comparison to his former intensity; but it was not a blank emptiness . . . I was struggling to understand how it was when he spoke of it himself—at once—saying: I’ve been as a man setting fire to himself, I’ve gone back through everything, night and day, trying to see through it. Until last night all was blank of any answer. But then, when I had burned up every feeling I had ever had to its ashes, why, then—a certain answer came. And from her—from all that she was, the way she lived and died. It was as if she were saying: But now, Clive, only now

you are empty enough for the fullness, only now are you ready to receive it . . .

‘But he faltered of these words, and he cried: It is hard to say how it was in any one word or another. How, suddenly, the terrible emptiness I felt became an—an expectation. It is all of her, of coming to feel again through her what I did for that moment in the tree. It all amounts to a hope that I might come again to know what I did up there. This is why it is clear to me now that I must go on working with the fruit, on and on, through years, maybe, until I am able to—to receive that feeling again. I think it will come through apples, in a tree, through that living memory of her.

‘Then he cried with sudden passion: Don’t misunderstand me, don’t misunderstand my search! It isn’t for any ghost of her. *I am the ghost that seeks her—living!*

‘In these words I heard it—voice of the very year speaking, from empty pod and shriveled leaf. Voice of August—this time of the year, with all our lives come to it. *I am the ghost!*—the thing spent, the form taken and fallen. I am not Life, Life has but been in me for a season.

‘The year for us all was drawn and held within the intuition of these words. I thought you might want to know this—it seems so deeply to be of the inner nature of this year we are living here for you.’

SEPTEMBER

The Frost-Flower

Now the September moon hung low to a sky red, with the heat of the whole summer in it, feverish of its futile burning. The leaves were still on the trees and were green, but they were without fullness and color, they had only an appearance of them. This was September, wearing the garments of summer, but being without its full-veined body beneath them. Not yet bared to the reality of winter; no longer veiled with the drapery of summer, nor covered with the blush of fall—the earth was without the truth of season: it had a deception about it that could be felt in oneself as uncertainty; for when Nature herself deceives, the ground indeed falls away from one's basic dependence. There was this air of deception in the mood of September.

The corn was just cut, but not yet shocked, nor the fodder hauled in; the fields therefore had this much look of the harvest that October would bring with more gold for the green, more mellowing for the air. But there was not yet the warm rotting to be felt; the heat abroad in the land in day, and reflected by the moon at night, was that of summer brought to futility this late time of year—dry, stagnant, in not being life-giving.

Zayda had been staying at home for several weeks, send-

ing in her place one of Cleony's girls who was back for a month or two. Wanting Zayda, the time wanted connection with the place, and all the rest of the year that was bound to it. I felt it so, disconnected: not in the continuity I had been living, but strangely reverted to time past, to other unresolved summers in my life. Wanting Zayda! she who somehow wove or held together this new sequence I was living—as if it were by her own living of it before me. She said only that she was tired, and needed a rest. This was true, and yet . . . there was something else that I was beginning to fear—for Dirk. But I put the thought from me, trying to feel: It is only the uncertainty in the time itself, this futile, unproductive warmth.

Cleony's girl was strange in Zayda's place, strange even as Cleony's daughter, for she did not seem to belong either to the place or to Cleony. Never liking it, she had left it early. It's a ghost of a place, she said when she came: I left it 'cause it was so ghostlike, I wouldn't no more help Mommy clean up a closed house, nuh-huh, ma'am!

This was Berry, the only one who had come back so far: she was largely bones and gloomy, with her own being so much enclosed that—probably—she resented the house for its likeness. Her ghosts were within her; all that she knew and felt was but as a shadow with the living substance gone out of it. Unable to feel us in any way, she still felt the house closed: our living here now did not count, it did not scratch the surface of the tomb she felt the place to be. Nuh-huh! Couldn't never open it noway, she said with her plethora of negatives that grew from her gloom as their very soil: Nuh-huh is what I say to this place, nuh-huh! And with her big-boned hand she canceled it all in the air.

Strange to the place, yet she was familiar in the time (wanting now connection with the place!). Veritable spokes-

man of it, especially for Janet. She confirmed a fear Janet had. Winter in this place? Nuh-huh, ma'am. Me, I'm going straight back to town come winter. This here place is all mud and wind in winter. Come November, I'm already gone.

Janet used what Berry had said on Father: But you can't stay the year up, not the winter through when even a servant says it isn't fit to live here.

Janet was dreading far more than the weather. It seemed to be—time itself, moving on from this month. September, I thought, is as far as she has gone in herself in the time of her life; she is holding back there from winter. This was the anniversary month of her meeting with Father. She went about sighing, to remind him of it: One year ago! Her look was one of promise unfulfilled, security unsecured. Yet it was from the winter of despair that you promised to save me!

She kept elaborating this theme: And winter in this place of all places, with nothing but mud and dung and the stars for our nearest neighbors! But feeling in her voice grew to her words' elaboration. Her fear was a real one: it was coming from depths I had not felt before in her. She began to hear herself in a kind of echo, and take fright from what she was saying: Winter, winter, but I thought it was from this you came to save me!

For a while the heat held her complaints in check: the September deception that set in, mid-month. It even held her, summer-silenced. But then Berry came one morning with her gloomy forecasting: Never y'all be fooled by this heat. Looky there on that hillside, frost-flower is in bloom. That means there'll be frost soon, that is a sign, each year I go by it, I go back to town by the frost-flower.

I looked where she pointed, and there—a white sifting of

tiny wild asters, like frost indeed, on the yellowing grasses. Still it was unimaginable—with the moon so red at night, and the night restless with warmth and a kind of fever that was laying hold of me no less than of Janet, for youth gone with summer, threat of the winter of age before me.

Berry started Janet off again: Do you hear, Larry? Frost! On all this earth. My neuralgia! And anyway the loneliness! And what is the end to be now, or when the year is up? Only more involved in that man's life. And I tell you, I wont take on another's life, I have all I can do to bear my own!

Father just said: But we must stay for Hayes' visit: we owe him that. Zayda says he usually comes around Christmas, before the end of the year.

Berry, unfortunately, heard them. She canceled Christmas with her big hands: Oh, that's the worst time of all! It's all frost and damp at Christmas; cold and snow aint come yet, it's just frost-damp at Christmas, can't noway leave the house for sleet and such.

But now Cleony heard her—making excuses for herself, for not staying home until Christmas. And Cleony appeared from the kitchen calling: Now, Be'y, y'all keep yore complaints to yoreself, doan give um t' someone else. Yo're jest one of dem car'eas, dat's what yo' is, one of dem car'eas what takes trouble aroun' spreadin' it.

And she whipped Berry with her tongue back into the kitchen, to let out the rest of what she had to say to her. We heard Cleony at it alone, silencing even Berry by the sheer volume of her talking.

* * *

Father kept answering Janet quietly about Christmas, and vaguely about time after that. But he was not so quiet as he

seemed, nor yet so certain. One day in the garden it broke from him and flowed toward me—what I had been waiting for him to tell me.

We were gleaning the last fruits. In need of vegetables for dinner, Cleony had sent us out, to get a 'mess a somethin' or otha' out of the garden, for a 'mix-up of what's left thar.'

Father looked up from a row of beans to one of okra next to where I was picking the few pods of it that were small and green yet among the many that had gone huge, tough, and to seed. (It was summer and fall together here, September in the garden.) Father's face was its full summer-red around the blue of his eyes, as he said directly:

— Jay, what am I to do about Janet? I'm failing her somehow, and I must not. It isn't only El Farm, the loneliness and dampness and her neuralgia—that is the least of it. It's all that this stands for—time passing for her; and she wont go with it. She keeps looking back and clinging, though God knows she has little enough to cling to. This is the trouble: what lies behind her. It was all so unhappy, and I can't send her back to it, not after what nearly happened, in Paris.

All this at once, from Father! I received it in the very silence of my long waiting-to-hear. Father bent again to his picking, the red in his face rising to the high white line of his hair both from the summer-heat and the inner warmth of his feeling about Janet. He said nothing more until he had finished his row. Then he looked up from the last green of it gleaned from the brown.

And you see, he said, I can't go with her. I am bound to stay here by something more than I can tell her—or anyone.

Now he looked at me as, for months, I had been wanting him to look: searchingly, for what waited in me to be searched for, and recognized, by him. I could not tell what

he saw, in that perfect balance he kept on his feeling, as always, until—abruptly turning from his search of me—he unbuttoned his shirt pocket and took out—the Letter!

Julia, he said, I cannot even tell you. But perhaps Hayes can. You seem to speak the same language, you even write somewhat alike. I suppose this is because both of you are literary, as I am not. It helps in matters like this, it gives fluency to what is difficult to put into words, at best.

Here! he said. And he gave me the Letter!

— Here is the part I haven't shown anyone yet, that contains the thing that binds me to Hayes. Perhaps from him you can understand, as you could not from me.

He left me wordless to his words 'from him . . . as not from me.' Wholly silent himself of what they implied, he stooped and took my basket from the ground.

— I'll take the vegetables to Cleony while you read. Afterward we will talk of Janet. Then, perhaps, you can help me decide where my truer duty lies.

And he went, leaving me . . .

. . . Letter in hand!—and that night, out of which this year of my life had issue: that birth-night of this year for me, from this new fatherhood felt in Father. Here, that writing I had not seen since May. What he had written then was inherent in May for my understanding of it. Would this be true for September?

Almost afraid of a confirmation in the Letter, I let my eyes fall slowly to the words. They were continuous from a sheet Father had not included. How like him this was, to offer the stream running, to plunge me headlong into it! But, were I not to plunge, must I not hesitate, thinking: This part cannot be for me!

‘. . . but need I recall that fatal message from you that brought our meeting about? The very paper of it in my hand gave me a shock before I saw the words: Report at once . . . reconnaissance . . . immediate advance. Then I did not think only of the danger in that word advance, but of the fact that you were ordering me to my death, when I had had such a different expectation of you.

‘You have, perhaps, some idea of what this might have been, from how your men usually took you. I had heard, before coming into your battalion, of something that others called your detachment from your command. It was said to be not the usual military indifference to death for yourself or your men; there was nothing hard or tough about it. Even the least sensitive of your men felt it to be a reserve of yourself for some other purpose. Even Captain K. of Battery A. (Remember him? He was such a mule of a fellow that we made a jingle about him: Captain K. of Battery A laughed heehaw and answered neigh.) Even he was aware of it. What he said was: He makes you feel that something will be left of you after you are blown to bloody bits. Others came nearer it in associating this reserve of yours to life. They said: He makes you feel there will still be something left to live for if we do come through this bloody business.

‘This came nearer my own impression of what your extreme reserve meant: a withholding of yourself for some living purpose, not this ghastly death or degeneration of life before us. Everything about you presented War deprived of its misleading emotional glammers—I had run the whole gamut of them in my youthful service!—exposed in its truth as a dehumanized, mechanical action in which we were all involved through the very error of our thinking of life in these terms. I could feel from the start that you would require a courage of your men that would be far greater than

any inspired by the various illusions of other officers; that you stood yourself ready to die for the truth, but not for the illusion; and that you would require them to do the same. But what this living purpose was, or what truth there might be beyond this hideous mistake, I could not imagine from just this impression; I could only anticipate somehow getting to know you better.

'All this is why that command came so hard to me: before I reported to you I knew well enough that it would be upon absolutely untenable ground. For we were all but lost as it was, standing still. Death stood to mock a wordless hope I had had of you—that we might come through something alive together.

'I kept telling myself as I rode up to report to you that this detachment of yours was nothing more than the usual military indifference to life or death. I had been seven kinds of a hopeful fool to think it could be anything else. It wasn't my first hope of a "living purpose" that could withstand both error and death: rather, it was a revival of something I thought dead in me. On this ride between my Battery O.P. and the Battalion O.P. my doubt of you was one of myself; I realized this afterward, when also I realized why this was one of the most bitter moments of my life—with despair commensurate with my hope to make it so.

'The way you received me didn't help matters any. You were still more detached, more strictly military. I found you quiet and cold, with the death of your command in your voice, when you said, without looking up: I regret . . . but only your Battery is available . . . There is no other way . . . but, so far as possible, keep men and animals unexposed.

'Perhaps you will remember how I looked when, finally, you did glance up to see. How I kept standing on, as if something else had to be said between us. You sat so rigidly,

examining your map, marking the new position where my Battery and I must meet almost certain destruction. You made a little cross on the place. My thought hardened to that: Just a little cross mark to him, where I and my men have been picked to be blown up.

'I wasn't thinking simply of my death: I had gotten orders almost as fatal before, a shade or two of difference in position didn't count much. No, I was feeling something beyond this: Why does it have to be under his command? Something began to let loose in me as I stood there—a whole chaos of thought, feeling, memory, hope, jumbled together. And it all seemed to be related to you, rather than to this command of yours. But there was no explaining it to myself. This, I thought, is the ultimate of your being a fool. Click into this business and leave. But I stood on, until you looked up again, longer this time. Then you asked me if there was something I wished to say.

'You looked—in a different way at me. Still with detachment, but in a kind of double way: as if you were looking both as soldier and as man, with the man withdrawn from the soldier. I had a clear impression of this, through all my confusion. I thought with sudden definiteness: It *is* as two men we are meeting, not as soldiers. But this made less sense than what I had felt before; and I reminded myself grimly that even if this might be true it was to no end since one of these men, maybe both, would be dead by morning.

'You were patient. If you had been only superior officer I should have been dismissed for hanging around as I was. You asked me again if I had something to say. Then I managed to ask the usual thing, that a communication wire be laid to the new O.P., and suggested that one gun be moved to the new position if night firing were contemplated. You gave a formal agreement, and yet—something came into

your voice that made me feel as if that wire were not going to be the only line of communication between us tonight.

'I got myself off and went back to my C.P. to move up the one gun. Some desultory firing was going on; but I was indifferent to it, lost in the mixed feelings I was having about you. I was in a muddle, to say the least. Something kept coming to me as if it were trying to be remembered; and something else—as if it were trying to be foreseen! The first was a past I had put from me—my past life at Hayes El. I kept having a dogged kind of impression that I had just come into the War from Kentucky, from Hayes El: I suffered a kind of amnesia of the years between. The second something, that was connected with the future, seemed to be coming from you. And—to make the muddle worse—there seemed to be some connection between the memory and the anticipation!

'While all this was taking chaotic place within me, you rode up. Your coming brought another of those inward shocks. It was within the military situation all right; but it was different. Something had happened to you on the way over. You had run into some of that fire and gotten hit in the foot, and your horse had fallen under you. You came on a makeshift of a mount unworthy of you. This helped to break down that perfect picture of an officer you made; it gave the man entrance even into your appearance. Maybe I had become this so far in myself in the meantime that I couldn't see anything else in you. In any case—I definitely felt you in that second way, as man within the whole military situation. And I felt this situation as the unreal one, as just a kind of framework about something that was really happening to me inside it.

'All this was queerer still, but it did not bring confusion. I began to clear up now when I saw you: I accepted your

coming to be with me during that advance as a matter of fact as well as of feeling. So we rode on.

‘Whatever else you might have forgotten, you must remember—the quiet splendor of this evening. The sun was setting in the moment—over enemy terrain. But in such a way that it might have been going down behind a homestead of ultimate peace. We were in rather nice country, virgin still to the use of war, woodland and meadow, and the woods green yet and some of the grass. A valley, with all the appearances and atmospheres of peace that a valley can have, lay between us and the enemy. The sun went down into such a blue mist as I could remember at Hayes El with my first memory. Maybe this is what brought on my next experience. Riding with you was not riding with another, but only with myself in a way I had ridden at Hayes El, as a boy: a way I had tried to put from my thought and memory of that place, and that I had believed was forgotten or discredited as a boy’s dream. It is hard to put into words just how this was: only in the past few years has it resolved itself into them for me. What I write of it is not what I thought in so many terms of it then, but only now after years of reflection, and of other fleeting visitations of the same experience.

‘I was transported during this ride up to the new O.P.—actually transported back to Hayes El. And I was riding as a boy of about sixteen, as now and again I rode then, with a sense of a peculiar and wonderful completeness. It was as if all I would grow to be—myself at every age—were present in the moment, in an existence attendant upon me. I felt a wonderful fullness: a kind of perfection in which all I was youthfully desiring to be, rested—safeguarded. It was a feeling of having within me, as I rode, my father and my son:

all that from which I had been born, and that which I would myself bear. But it was having these with me not as others but as myself: it was a sort of feeling the generations within myself.

‘Something in you, in the moment, struck me into this experience; and this seemed to have been waiting through all the years for me to feel it again, as if the moment between us was in connection with that past time. And as if my one true destiny was bound up in this connection.

‘And something more unaccountable happened outside, as within: to the landscape. The situation of war—the enemy position in the glow of the setting sun, guns and other trappings of war—did not displace the inner scene that was of Kentucky. Rather I saw before me—white-fenced meadows, and water holes, and myself riding only to water my horse in one where the sun was going down into an utter peace that one day was making with one night. Call it but a moment of transference (as I did afterward, or tried to) and you haven’t explained anything, but have only given it a name. No explanation has ever approached the reality for me except this: that within there is a timeless stream of events in our lives, and that now and again—when forced to it—we break through to this stream; and then—one miracle of awakening takes place, similar in men the world over, no matter how the break was made.

‘In all this time you said nothing that was not military; in fact you said almost nothing at all. You just rode beside me on that hack of a horse (I had offered you mine, but you had too much pain in the moment to change) in some easy, genial way, a different look on your face, almost a smile—as if you might be having such a memory as mine. I didn’t give you much thought at the time, but I had an impression of

being encouraged by you to lapse into the experience I was having. At least you didn't recall me in any way to the moment.

'Once we were up at the O.P. there was plenty to recall me of itself. You sort of rode out of the picture, to fix up your foot, but also to leave the placement and the registering of fire to me. But, though the situation claimed me wholly for the next hour, I was aware that something within myself was waiting upon all this preparation, to get it over. I was irritated and impatient to be done with it. We had had word that the attack from the enemy would not be made until dawn, so we would have time and too much of it for answering. Once fire was registered, there was little or nothing we could do but wait. Yet I was a perfect devil of a fellow getting things done, as if for an attack to be made in the next minute instead of the next morning. In turning devil I was only fitting into this whole business of war that suddenly I was feeling as devilish: I mean that word in the sense of being fiendishly fantastic. For the scene around me became a horrible caricature of that other landscape, of Kentucky, imitating but mocking horribly its beauty and peace. It was ghastly, and I was nothing but a ghost of myself, and a fiendish one, acting within it. I remember definitely feeling that I would go mad with the whole outer moment's madness if I didn't get out of it, back into that other time and place which waited for me, with you.

'You had retired some fifty-odd feet behind the phones to bind up your foot, and you called to me casually, saying: Hayes, come on back and have a smoke with me when you get things set up. Now I knew that you were going to see this thing through with me and share whatever might happen. As soon as I could, I joined you.

'It was nine o'clock, and the moon was rising above the

wood; and a strange silence rose with it, above all lower sounds. These began to settle under it—to be covered but not blotted out, just covered over with the immense silence of the rising Night. We sat crouched behind sandbags in a little clearing. You were halfway lying down because of your foot, and I sat on a stump of a tree freshly cut for the clearing. That nice odor of wood mingled with our first cigarette. We had about half a dozen each left. As you counted yours you made your first remark after I had come.

‘We must measure our smoking to the moon, you said. Divide the path of it into six parts.

‘And you looked up to the sky and began to chart it for the star of our next smoke. Your doing that struck me with a memory of how you had looked when you picked out that place on the map for me to die upon. With that first irony of mine, I felt: The devil! Now he is charting the heavens too for my end. I was beginning to have mixed feelings again: to flare up inside both with resentment and with hope, as if these were two poles of the same feeling.

‘At first I thought you were going to try to divert me from the thought of the dawn, and what it would bring. You went on to talk of the stars, pointing out one and another constellation. It took some time for me to go blazing through my first suspicion to an observation of you that was clear of it. Then I saw that you were not doing this to divert me or yourself, but to find some way outside this damnable situation, to see it in the totality of its happening. You were deliberately trying to be objective in a way large beyond any I had seen tried by a man before except once, by one in a different connection. What you said talks itself clearly to me in this moment.

‘Tonight for the earth, you began, is not different, you see, from any other. Here she is rolling through the universe

obedient to the same laws though men on all sides of her are trying to blow her up with themselves. Dawn will come, Hayes, not differently.

'This drew bitterness from me: Yes, it will come, indifferent to our dying.

'You deliberated this, but said: No, it is not the earth that is indifferent to us but we to the earth. In this very moment it is we who are being indifferent to her nature and her laws. Her wisdom is written there in the sky, but we are not reading it.

'I was drawn into the argument by the very way it was coming to you—not as a philosophy thought out, but as some wisdom coming directly from stars and moon. I asked you what this wisdom might be.

'Well, Hayes, consider, you said: Doesn't it seem quite simply to be a turning to the light, as the earth moves, as plants grow, and as our consciousness comes and goes with the day and night?

'I began to consider—quite simply, as you said: earth and sun, moon and stars . . . Suddenly, as if with your sight in the moment, I saw the earth rolling through Time, with wisdom, mathematics, artistry, poetry of its own, with which this night could not interfere. All became as some living knowledge that might directly be communicable to man. From this edge of space and time where I was in the moment, I felt myself close to such communication! I think your words carried me farther than you were going yourself; for you went on to talk of Man himself while I was trying to lose myself in some drama of moon and star. We were now on our second cigarette, and the moon was halfway to the stars over us.

'You had been speaking casually, sort of drifting into what you said; but now a new definiteness came into your

voice and words, and a note of an impassioned thinking.

‘Don’t you see, Hayes? you cried: We as men are standing in our own light, we are thinking in our own shadows! We kill things by thinking of them; all we have left is a corpse. This is what we have done with the whole living earth, the sun and stars, as with our own souls. You notice, however, that the earth goes on living, no matter how much we take it apart and say it is one lifeless chemical or another. We say life is an accident, but it goes on moving with order and intelligence outside our own. We turn from the light, and die in our own darkness. But a plant goes right on turning to it, living or bearing seeds out of its death. Yes, Hayes! I think we must return to the earth for our wisdom. We have lost the way, the very way of the earth!

‘I came back, from taking the cosmos in my stride, to Man—as you pictured him—Man, standing in his own shadow. To myself pictured in this way! What you were saying cued me back to Hayes El—that about earth and earth-knowledge, not to a simple memory of it but that kind I had in riding. I began to see pictures, one after another; and in flashes that brought both light and color into my mind. At first they were just of landscapes, of Hayes El itself.

‘You changed what you were saying suddenly, you startled me into an actual jump by saying: Where are you from, Hayes?

‘This could not have been coincidental or casual. You must have had some insight, or seen something reflected from those pictures I was seeing. I told you Kentucky. Then you got another start out of me. So am I, you said. And you asked me what county. I told you of Hayes El, where it lay on the River. You said: I know it. That is the knob country, it is not far from my own part of the Blue Grass. Then we

got down to it, about Kentucky. And in another moment, horses.

'Are they why you are in the artillery? you asked. And when I said Yes, you smiled: Same here. When the horse goes I go with it. They are what got me into it in the first place. We settled then upon horses, we talked studs and fillies and all the lines of Chiefs and Rexes and Admirals. (My orderly told me long afterward that he heard this part of what we said, and he was ready to put a bet on one of the horses you mentioned though he never live to collect it.) All this was good enough; the moon got midway over us, and we were ready for our fourth cigarette. But it was only an interlude. It led me back *into* Hayes El. I don't remember just what I told you of the inward experience, as of that Boy riding; but I do know that it came more and more alive in that way as we went on talking. I say, alive; but there isn't any way I can write that word to show how much alive, or in what peculiar way: how, in what you led me to say or think, I found it living in myself. It was all like a live body about me: hills, trees, and the people, especially Old Hayes, and Drake. (What you had said about earth with a wisdom of her own—Old Hayes had been those words' prophet before you, their living prophet!)

'Maybe I can put my experience this way. There is a legend of Osiris, about his being held captive within the different bodies of the earth, especially the tree. This is how Hayes El came back to me now, all its forms—with some immortal part of myself alive within them. And only in them, nowhere else. The force of the memories themselves was hard enough to bear, but now another was added—of a realization that came in their wake: that only these memories lived for me, no others. You see—I had married not many months before. Here I stood, just a few hours before death,

at a time when I should have been writing, or at least thinking of—her. But I could not! I had no memory, I could not even recall what she looked like. Within me there was only Hayes El, only that earth and sky, those trees and that River; and all these were like so much of myself, that was not here where it should be if all were to die with me; but over there where—they would not die with me, but would wait and call and recall.

‘With the fifth cigarette, the moon paling now to the sunrise, this terror began to come in flashes: that the dawn would not bring me a simple and final death, but one that was broken as my own life thread had been broken when I left Hayes El. Now it was not only a body living when mine would die; but it was so many voices speaking in a way that I felt must follow me into the last silence of death. There was the voice of Old Hayes—as he had spoken to me before I had gone, imploring me to stay on the land and be a son to its inheritance. Voice of Drake Parker in a scene with Old Hayes that I had witnessed, when Drake refused all that was offered him. Drake was only a boy at the time, but he spoke as a man, with words given him. (All his life Drake Parker has spoken in this way, as if given words.) If I were to die a thousand deaths, I thought, this voice of Drake Parker’s would go with me, saying: I would rather be nameless, for what need has a man for a name beside that of Man himself? There were other, less splendid voices: Brent’s, as he went babbling into one of his fits; and many that were not human, animal voices, of horse and sheep—the bleating of sheep between the hills. They all made one cry that was torture to me. For I felt: There it is, all living to be lived, and I have fled it, I have refused this true destiny, to take on another that is strange and alien and will end tonight while the other one lives, and waits, and will be waiting.

'In this moment you held a match, for our sixth and last cigarette. You bent close, and your face was shadowed of all but the region around the eyes. And all below was shadow save for the burning match and the cigarette. The way I saw you—close, and through the flame—brought me out of thought of myself to one of you: an inward, burning sort of thought. Why were you here when you did not have to be? Why had you deliberately chosen to come to be with me, to—die with me? Was it conceivably possible that my most inner sense of you was a true one: that you did have something to give your men, and that you had chosen me as the one to give it to? And that this thing was—life? some life that you believed would survive death, or somehow penetrate its experience? Was it possible that you were here to offer yourself to this "living purpose" which really you believed would outlive Death, that was your profession and your destiny? You can see that my thought stopped at nothing now! It even went farther. I felt you, in personal essence, as a kind of father to something in me—to this one thing that was surviving my whole life, and so alone would survive my death . . . if anything . . .

'Our last cigarette! Here in our hands now, this little burning cinder, same element as that which would destroy us in another few moments: same shape and element as the sun that would time our destruction. This was my reminder—it came like something burning into me, here in my hand.

'You had been silent, but now you spoke as if with the full content of your silence, saying: Hayes, there is something we must believe. I've been feeling toward this all my life, but it only begins to come clear this near the end. It is all I can say about this thing that may be before us if we die, or that will lie behind us to return to, if we live.

'But my question about you began to clamor against what

you were saying. I had to cry it at you: But tell me why you have come. Have you deliberately chosen death?

'Now your hand on your cigarette—half burned away!—shook. I felt that it was some inner reason in you that made it shake; not death, half a cigarette away.

'I have not deliberately chosen, you said. I came because something drew me beyond any one thought or another about it. I just felt, that some time I must take the command I gave another. And this seemed the right time—with you.

'I had to blaze my question: But why me?

'You shook your head to this: I can't tell you, Hayes. That is something for either life or death to answer.

'But this close to death—my cigarette burning my fingers!—I could not quite make the grade of it. I had to cry out: But death? But if we die?

'Then, slowly, you tried to bring it to word, out of yourself.

'I just believe, you said, that we live something within our lives that is not mortal either to life or death. And this is something we share with everything living. And everything does live. I mean, Hayes, the very earth, in the way I have just spoken of, with a life of its own that is at the same time our life, our destiny. And this is—ininitely greater than any one life, or death. I don't think that we can die from this, either in life or death; but of these two it is easier to lose ourselves to—life. You'd better be asking, Hayes: What if we live? Yes, I think that is the question to be put: What if we live?

'These words, written in this way, cannot stand for how you said them, or how I heard. They had a power that would have to be experienced—a creative power, to create their own meaning. For me they had precisely this in the next moment . . .

‘How can I write of this next moment? How bring it to any word that will not sound as a strange tongue even to myself? Perhaps I can picture it somehow. The moon was paling now to the dawn; in the east there was the first faint foreshadowing of red; in the woods, the first stir of life, timed in some organic way as the heart beats, to the rising of the sun. We had both gotten up; we were standing back in military form, looking to our horses, ready. But at the same time that I was bound by every nerve and thought to the imminent happening, I was also alive outside it. It seemed that I had gone crashing ahead into what was before me: that I was in the moment riding through fire of dawn and gun, and dying in one blaze and blast of a vision within all vision, to life within life, and life within death.

‘How can I write this! Can I say that I seemed to die while yet living, and to see everything from the other side? My whole life flashed now in connected pictures, or rather, impressions, in degrees of livingness. I saw faces and forms, but in terms of light and color that were, it seemed, the terms of their life and reality. They were strong or weak, beautiful or ugly, as if with an inner truth of person or thing pictured. The comparisons were relentless: what I wanted to be true, from personal pride or convenience, had no effect upon them. All thought and desire went down before the imagery. I was up against reality undreamed—a living-in-itself, in people and places and things. And Hayes El bore all the livingness!

‘All this was that way of thinking of which you had spoken! But it was so different, I thought it must be coming from death rather than life. I actually thought I had been killed by some sudden silent shot, and this was the vision of death. In any case, what I had now was the experience itself of all you had said, or that I had myself had intimation of. This

was the reality, the truth: this was that conscious discovery: that immediate way of knowing things: that standing to the light, out of one's own shadow.

'It was at the height of such experience that—sun and guns together shot red into the sky across the valley. Attack at dawn! Not knowing whether I was dead or alive, I rode into it, with one command ringing through me, that seemed to be spoken by you. Ride, Hayes, ride as that Boy, for it is true—he does bear within himself Father and Son. So—as this Boy—I rode, secure in the knowledge that I could not die because I was riding in an eternal continuity of all Life.

'The rest you know. How we fell together, almost at once; and came to, much later, on stretchers, side by side, prisoners of war. But—do you remember how I said to you, as we were about to be separated: Go to Hayes El for me, make that return? And how you answered me: I will, Hayes, I promise?

'I cannot be sure that actually we said this. I was pretty badly hurt, as you know. I thought, of course, that I was going to die: it was in my mind then to send you there, for this reason. And perhaps the promise you gave—if actually you did give it—was one made only to a man you thought was dying. However!—I have lived only to make this request of you again, having—as you said—lost more to life than to death. You yourself put the challenge to the whole experience: We must leave that to life or death to answer. So now it is—to life, and to you, that I leave it.

'I am counting on you, my dear Colonel, to understand all this better than I! Not to wonder too much why I am sending you, or to what. You were never one to press questions. That is why I am trusting you now, as I would not trust myself: you who are free now as I am not . . .'

* * *

Mid-sentence, as it began, the part Father had given me ended. I looked up to see him coming slowly toward me, a conflict of hope and uncertainty in his bearing. He was in riding clothes: I could see how he has spent this hour of my reading! He was very hot, with his usual upstanding hair lying flatly wet across his forehead.

It is so warm, he said, it is hard to see how frost soon might come. Dinner is ready, Cleony got it earlier, we wont have time to change.

I scrambled to my feet, shaking pods. I handed him the Letter.

It is hard, he murmured as he took it, to understand something like this out of the extraordinary context of its experience.

But such context is here, I said as we went: Kirtley Hayes sent you to the past and the future of what you felt on that night—your own past and future as well as his, Father.

He flashed me a warm look of relief that was still incredulous of itself, shy, but venturing to believe.

It is good, he said, to have you understand.

But then, as if to restrict this understanding, he held me to his other purpose in giving me the Letter.

Maybe now you can help me about Janet, he said, tell me where my greater duty lies.

Warmly then, I—perhaps too warmly—with my whole soul, my whole sense of purpose, with a consecration that was my own:

— Unquestionably, Father, it is to Captain Hayes!

But I haven't told you about Janet yet, he reminded me, and you would have to know that before you could judge.

— Then tell me!

I was impatient of what I had to know about her. Never more the intruder, Janet, than in this moment!

After supper, he said, we will take a little walk, if I can get away.

We were at the house, and there was Janet looking for us. She caught it—the way we were coming in together: Father in a hushed mood, I in a rapture of new understanding. This mood in Father was always torment to her. Her complaints, that she kept superficial, were obvious of their defense against the inner torment.

— Oh, Larry, where have you been? And now there is no time for you to change, and you knew dinner was to be early!

Father really went into retreat now: he went calm, and deep and firm in himself. He only said in reply: More often than not, I am sure, Captain Hayes and Old Hayes before him ate in their boots.

In the midst of all else she had to say Janet went silent—before this way Father was in himself, living in a way from which she was utterly excluded.

* * *

We've only a short time to walk, Father said as we started up the road. I had a hard time getting away from Janet; I had to tell her that you had something to talk to me about.

Still we walked quite a while before he could bring himself to it. Was it not because he was thinking—as I was—of that other evening in September? There was no moon yet; but the foreglow was in the sky, a flush upon the greenish pallor of the evening light. Must not all moons to him be that one moon?

But at last he came to it, with a sigh.

It was in Paris, he began, on my way home from retirement.

What he told me then, in any one word or another, is not

what I write now: this is what he intoned or implied or—it might be—withheld from saying. And also it is what I knew of Janet that he did not, from something of her in myself. And what also of Paris I knew, and not long since, only the spring of the fall of which he spoke. In no time past but in one forever present, in the peculiar immediacy of that place, Paris—this, of a woman, lonely . . .

* * *

Spring or fall—in Paris there is little difference in color. Paris is turning green, outwardly to green of leaf in the spring, inwardly to the green of its old stones in the fall. Let rain come, and you see this one underlying color, whether in the Gardens or in the Places.

Girl of twenty-eight in the spring, woman of forty-eight in the fall, little difference. Paris has one taunt for both: Alone, madame? Or worse, with insult added to irony: Alone, mademoiselle? It is the mockery of the whole place, coming from a hundred sources. In the voice of the waiters: One, madame? Or of the concierges: You are alone, madame? Or unspoken, from the linked arms, the clasped hands, the meeting lips in the Bois, the Gardens, on the Boulevards. Everywhere in the great crowded Places, the concerted noises make one sound, arching that question above all inner silence. Alone? It is less lonely to be alone in farthest Tibet than in Paris; for here there is no place to be lonely in, no private or secret margin anywhere. No, not even in the most leaf-sequestered nook in the Gardens: image of two is imprinted on the very air, voices whisper it . . .

In the Luxembourg Gardens, in the shadow of the chestnut or plane trees, spring or fall: only the color of the sun and the shade of it on the gravel or grass vary to the time. In the spring it is more bland, it lies more vaguely on the

ground, one sits more suffused with it, not so keenly penetrated. By fall the light is more intense, it lies in bright stones under the trees and one's thoughts brighten and harden to them, in contemplation. But it is all one light and one shade: one passing throng and one inner isolation. And Janet, in the fall, and I in the spring, are as one woman sitting here to the taunt: Alone?

Along the Allée where she sits—a man strolls, back and forth, passing her, without seeing her vivid loneliness, being so deep within himself, in one of his own. It is Father, still in uniform, on his way home for retirement, the letter from Captain Hayes in his hand, just received. He reads a little as he walks, then folds the letter, and just walks—going backward in time, through more than fifteen years of it, to that night commemorated anew to him, in the letter. In a dazed spinning of memory backwards he walks—and even stumbles a little now and again, so swift and blinding the flow of thought. Before the letter came, his retirement itself had turned him backward, with the question: Now that the time has come, my one time of freedom, what is left? what, of a lifetime of living toward this moment? The answer was a blank, for nothing seemed to be left of that lifetime. He had gone through the second marriage that, a few years before, ended in divorce. Nothing is left, of all he had sought in the woman as Woman herself: all that beauty and grace and other-being that a man, from the more hardened forms of himself, seeks outside it. He can see now, from his own words that Hayes has recalled in his letter, why this is so: in love he had cast a shadow before him, one of idealistic desire. He had avoided that one danger, of standing bodily in his own light, only to fall into another: of letting shadow instead of substance cloud his forward vision. He had been mistaken in the second marriage by his very hope of it: he

had been betrayed, not so much by the woman or by love, as by his own idealism. His divorce from her was in essence a separation from this—the last of the idealisms that had so subtly shadowed his life.

And the first marriage—what of it? It lies on the other side of the night in the letter; but the light of those words illumines it as well. The failure of the first marriage lies, to his view of it now, from a mistaken hope of death: that something in the first wife, the first love, would survive it. He had created this hope out of himself, not out of the woman. She had died with such a finality of being that she had seemed never to have lived. Nothing in her or their love had been strong or vivid enough even to survive in a living memory. When he had fled her sister and her sudden passion for the children that reached toward him as their father, he had been fleeing the haunt of the lifeless, the unreal, in her resemblance to the dead. When he fled the children too, it was because their birth had seemed to be one from this death. He had stayed away from them as from another bewildered awakening to a reality of both life and death that was still escaping him.

But now what of the children? Now the time has come when he can return to them, and when he must; for now they have need of him—they have themselves just written of their need. And the letter from Hayes has come also as an answer to their need. He has offered them the home offered him. All thought of them, however, is uncertain. He knows so little—nothing of the boy but of the peculiar defensive resentment he shows against everything; and nothing of the girl but the books she has written—those books of mockery and glibness and early despair! In reading them he has felt naïve to their sophistication. Yet, in knowing himself the use of despair—how fleet it is to cover ground that

must be traveled within—he finds in himself a faint, tentative hope for her: particularly now when her first failure has come, when her last book has—to use those words he had spoken to Hayes—died in its own darkness.

But grimly as he walks and walks, up and down the Allée, past Janet without seeing her—grimly he allows himself no one hope of the children, even if they do accept his offer. He must permit himself no further idealism, no shadow cast before him upon what he has to face himself, at last. And this is: what Hayes has recalled in his letter—the actual effort of those words, their meaning, their living fulfillment. He walks now, putting it all up to himself: How am I myself to keep this promise? How find in life what only death seems to present? How go on from one night, true to it, continuous from it? With the balance of my life so heavy against this, how can one night prevail against all the rest?

* * *

Now Janet—on the bench flanking the Allée. At first she does not notice him, either, being plunged into herself beyond a depth ever reached before. She is even beyond naming her terror in the moment; she only cries within herself against it: I cannot bear it! The last name she has given it is loneliness; but it goes even beyond that, now; and Janet has no intuition of suffering to understand it. It is of nothing outside her; nor even is it of experience; rather it seems to be of some new, profound, undreamed capacity for experience that life has thrust her into, below the last surface of herself held against it.

Janet is in mourning on this day, mauve mourning, for her husband. But his death is not her terror, nor even the way he has left her—almost penniless after a life of exorbitant wealth. The profounder feeling has engulfed all lesser

worries: the strange and unbearable thing about it is, that it has deprived her of all usual emotional outlets like worry, and all the hysterias in which she has indulged, her life through. Her marriage was sadistic of all the sophisticated cruelties—she is as well rehearsed in the dramatics of marital suffering as an actress, with utterance, gesture, all reaction familiar, and even timed, within her. She has dealt with adultery and desertion; with maudlin remorse, passion and coldness; with all the dissipations, and at last with their fatality for her husband's life. Yet all has been as a rôle played: words in her mouth, tears in her eyes, sobs shaking her shoulders: compared to this, this reality she knows now—this inner stillness, this waiting experience. Loneliness? But the word lies external to this being alone in herself as all else does: his death, her poverty, her personal inadequacy to deal with this. No, even it cannot describe, explain . . . The terror is nameless, and this is why it is such terror.

She has suffered it once before, a few weeks ago. In the miserable room she took just after his death, with a dramatic gesture of poverty. She did not sink into it then, but rather it rose and suddenly overwhelmed her. She was looking into the wretched mirror of her dresser in this dingy room when—that waiting aloneness, staring at her from the empty, unknowing and unliving eyes in the mirror. For the first time that realization had come: I cannot bear it! But not in words then, but in a deed. So far overwhelmed within that she had no clear thought of what she was doing, she moved away from the mirror, closed the door and the windows, turned on the gas jet and lay down to . . . But this, what was this? Not death, not oblivion! The room was not dark, though all was closed: she saw herself lying there, as in a light that could not be put out. She was outside the image on the bed, but

was like something caught in its flame and burning. And there was vision, and too much of it: better the empty eyes, the sealed inner nothingness! Oh, better, better by far was life, any kind of life, than death, if this were death!—this burning intensity, all seen and felt, a new and terrible all that was infinite . . .

When she struggled from the bed to save herself—flung windows open, and doors, and went back to the mirror—it was to put out that terrific inner light, and confine the inner vision to—an image in a mirror.

And so now. In sinking below the surface toward those waiting depths of consciousness, she struggles to limit and confine, turning outward . . . A gesture is ready—with her vanity—gesture of woman trying to identify all with the image. She plunges into her bag, takes out the fine silver powder case, relic of her days of wealth, snaps it open—urgently—as she had opened those windows; and seeks to confine and restore the image to the appearance that, alone, she can bear . . .

But again! The eyes stare back, empty. The face: too young, too unwritten. The image is one of unbearable emptiness. But how can this be, after all I have been through? Every passion, every desire. Life? But what is it that I have not known? What can the living thing be that goes through all else and endures—that I have never known—that I do not know now?

She begins to work on the image, applying color, eye shadow for depth to the empty eyes, eye brilliance for their dullness. But—it is no use. Still—empty—warning with emptiness—and years ahead to live, and years behind to remember. And life more and more like death, that death: life not a light to be put out, life a light that cannot be put out!

Now she is naming her terror, with this thought, this re-

membrance. All is life; time is unending, time will forever go on for me!

The vanity slips from her fingers to the gravel path. Slowly she bends with a sudden weight of all grief after it, not to retrieve but—with sudden violence to her image—to grind the glass to dust with the heel of her slipper.

* * *

In this moment Father, passing, sees—woman weeping, bending as if to pick up a shattered vanity case. If only she had picked it up! But no, he sees her smash it with her heel. And there is something in the gesture that reaches him, as no other could: this gesture of real, of absolute despair. No mere gallantry, but real compassion felt for real suffering forms words and intones voice as he says: I beg your pardon, but can I be of any help?

Slowly she raises herself to the voice that comes like one out of the past, not with what it says but with a certain intonation—soft, gentle, deeply inherent; and she sees . . .

Recognition comes slowly, struggling against her too-ready exclamation: It cannot be! Confusion sets in, almost driving Father away from the simple, stark grief that has drawn him to speak to her. But she cries to detain him; she forces the recognition out of her memory, crying:

— But wait, wait, wait! I know you. You are—wait now, let me get it for myself or else you'll think I'm just pretending to know you. You are—Larry Jarrell!

* * *

They sit, talking. Actually she has to tell him who she is; he cannot command the name. Memory lives only in a familiar sense of the odd violet-colored eyes. But it wants association. Janet is fluent to supply this.

— But, Larry, we were engaged once, at sixteen or so, back in Lexington. You wrote a lyric to my eyes, I still have it somewhere. Oh, Larry, don't tell me I have changed so much!

— No, no, I remember your eyes. I can well understand how I might have written a lyric to them.

(Now she is driving him from pity to mere gallantry.)

— You are the same Larry! So unfailingly gallant, so devastatingly naïve!

Before all this effusion Father begins to wonder: Why am I here? Where is this terrible grief I felt in her?

She becomes aware of his uncertainty just in time to save herself: just in time she sees—only pity is strong enough to hold him.

Oh, Larry, she cries, if you had not come just now, if you had not!

And then, just in time to keep him from withdrawing, memory brings the true terror again and she breaks to it. It is not wordless now, but so many words to tell him. It is bearable, with him here to help her bear it. She tells him—of the light seen in the darkness: of death that seemed but more life, and too much to bear. He hears—out of the letter, the words of the letter. She almost takes fright of the way he listens: what is she saying to him that he understands as she does not? But anything to hold him! She cries just the right words: Oh, Larry, to have someone understand!—even though she can glimmer in some far-off way how she might be held herself, through him, to the depths of that understanding.

* * *

At this point Father stopped to ask the question that had since tortured him:

— Was it a confusion, Jay, that I made of her need with the one Hayes and I had known together? At the time I thought: Here it is again in someone, I am drawn to it, I must meet it. It was—another border of life and death. I could see that I had not really lived my own way over this border, and here was a chance given me to do it, and not just for myself but for another. She was so weak and helpless and young in herself for it! There did seem to be this inner likeness of need, although all the rest was strange—all the rest of Janet, I mean, and how I found myself going about with her, and finally offering what Hayes had offered me. But now, since we've come here, I've been wondering: Could this only have been another idealism, after all, another shadow of Woman for me?

I knew I had to be careful of my answer, that it not be a shadow of my own cast upon Janet, or upon his going or staying.

I said with such care: You are asking this question for us all, Father, not just for yourself. You are really asking it of the experience itself—if it has the power and verity to prove itself true for us all. I can't trust my own feeling of Janet yet—it is a bit too womanish, I am afraid. And about your going or staying—not about that either, for I want myself to stay too much. I would be casting a shadow of my own on that, a shadow of . . .

But I did not say what. I went silent to my own crying through me: Oh, my soul, of what? what expectation?

He only answered my words 'of the experience itself.'

— Yes, of course, Jay, that is it. I can only let the experience prove how strong it is to hold me. I was pressing ahead again, trying to decide something that must decide itself.

We had come to the lane.

I'm walking on, I said. I want to see the moon rise.

We stood for a moment in the fading of the twilight, not into darkness but into the lighter foreglowing of the moon on the eastern horizon. Almost in a whisper Father spoke:

— This is the very night. I wonder if Hayes somewhere . . .

Then abruptly he turned up the lane, leaving me—with that same wonder as I walked up the road: Is he somewhere walking like this: alone and remembering?

* * *

I saw the moon rise from the crest of the hill beyond the turn of the road to Zayda's. Sitting on the saddled side of the road, I watched it come, red, and swollen to the size of the sun at the hour of setting. Heavily it rested on the blue mists of the hills, tearing and staining their gossamer.

I wanted to watch it from the time and the words of the Letter, but I could not: its rising was present, in a night of my own life. I could not even achieve my usual detachment of thought: something rose with the moon in me, bearing the beat and warmth of the heart to the mind, flooding the cool and quiet chambers of all thought, with a feeling-flow. . . . Thought became feeling, and I not separate from it. In no way was I author now, but the thing written; and this was no matter of words, but of warmth with a pulse in it, a kind of blurred scripture of the blood. Far from being in Father or Kirtley Hayes, I was in Janet now, in her restless yearning. Either way I looked in time, there seemed to be—yearning not to be satisfied, nothing in the past to hold me, nothing in the future to claim me. So for a long time . . . But gradually this ebbed away of itself, as if it had been no more than a tide that followed the law of tides, of ebb and flow. It left me, not restored to any former fullness, but rather barren and empty. All was gone with the tide—not even was

I left as I had been before. Nothing of the year known, or of the Letter, or of Father . . .

So great was the desolation that I got up and began to run back toward the house, thinking suddenly of Dirk, who was my one bodily experience of another as myself. I wanted to grip his hand and cry: Hold on to me, Dirk! This is getting born again—stay with me, I cannot be born alone. It was like an echo of a cry I had made before. I had that prenatal sense of him as I ran, of our descent to birth together, hand in hand tightly, whirling through time and space together. . . . Before this thing that was as a second birth before me, I sought him again in this way. But I knew as I ran that it was of no use: this birth must be alone, it was a birth into very loneliness, even from Father, though it was of him as my physical birth seemed not to have been. It was birth from the body and the blood—the one deathless birth, in the individuality of the spirit. The year in the very moment was going through it: only this was my companion, whirling through time and space . . .

But still when I saw Dirk—when he suddenly appeared out of the dark cross of the road leading to Zayda's—I caught up to him, and clung, and cried. He was in no mood to receive me, however! As if he were going through some sort of second birth himself, into an existence without me, he shook me off, with some new defense, not just sullen but spirited. We snapped at each other, in old and familiar ways of talking; but with a difference in each other realized.

— Jay, good God! What are you out for, to spy on me?

— Don't be a— Do you think I must stay in the house every time you go out?

— But why this way of the road and not the other?

— Why not this way?

— Let me ask you why not. Damn it, Jay, what do you think I am, what does she think?

— Hasn't she told you?

— You've guessed it, haven't you! What you don't set out to discover, you imagine for yourself! Well, she has told me what she thinks of me, but I'm still damned if I . . .

— Have you tried? Have you so much as stopped thinking yourself for a moment to let her thought reach you?

— If you're suggesting some calm meditative act while I . . .

— No, just ordinary listening. But tell me, Dirk, what has happened?

Tell me everything! he mocked. But he did tell me, after a moment of walking beside me, back toward the house. He told me as himself:

— It seemed that she must care for me. Do you think I would so much have suggested, if I hadn't felt something in her reaching out to me? Maybe it was only pity or tenderness, but it did reach—like love—and as no other girl has. And the way she gave me her child, gave him, as if she had borne him just to give me! And the way she did it, to make me overlook all about him, even forget it when he was with me and think: What does it matter? He is here and like so much of myself, the missing part. What could I think of all this but that she— If she could bring me as far as I went tonight, actually to admit all this to her, how could she send me away?

— Has she sent you away, Dirk?

— I don't know. I tell you I don't know what to think! She listened with a kind of—rapture. You know how she can look! Maybe it wasn't from what I said at all, but from something she was feeling herself. But it seemed to be—love,

her kind, maternal in that way she has of being maternal. Detached, you know, even from Boy. It was this detachment that drew me to her in the first place. You know how tormented I've been!

Yes, I knew. Zayda would be peace to this torment. I could understand how it was for him. But how, for her? She had listened with a kind of rapture!

The memory was torture for him. He cried with this:

— She listened, I tell you; she didn't stop me. There wasn't any refusal, not even when she said: You don't need me that much. Really you don't, Mister Dirk. Maybe a little now, but soon not at all and then you'd have me on your hands, and you'd think: My need of the moment has betrayed me. There, Jay, that is exactly what she said, and you thought I didn't listen!

He went stumbling on with his confession:

— Then she said: Need is love for a woman but not always so for a man—not at least when he is in the act of growing from one to another as you are. Maybe you can understand that, Jay, being a woman.

I listened in silence. And I heard: Your need for me is my love for you; but this is not to be considered—only how it is for you, in the very act of growing from one need to another, as you must grow. Nothing must prevent this—not I, binding you by tenderness, by the only kind of love I can feel, now that I have been released from the rest of it.

Rapture? Did he say rapture? But of course! Of love released, for the last sacrifice of itself, to the freedom of the beloved.

But now Dirk gripped my arm and demanded an answer:

— Jay, tell me. What do you make out of all of this?

I told him: I think she loves you, Dirk.

He was all one not-understanding.

— But . . .

— And that is why she is refusing you. You say you are ready for her kind of love, but I doubt that. Maybe your accident has forecast this need to come; but I think it is true, what she said about the act of growing: you need another kind of love, one with more challenge in it.

— She said that!

The words came surprised from him. They were part of the confession, perhaps, that he meant to withhold in his pride.

He repeated: She said almost those very words! I am too much peace for you, you would be restless shortly. You would think I didn't understand, and maybe I wouldn't. And then love would be left, but not understanding.

Dirk was listening to her as he repeated her words: listening with a new kind of hearing.

Jay, he cried, you see, that does sound as if . . .

Yes, Dirk, I said, more as if she, than you.

He stopped on the road, light of the full moon upon him. It was higher now in the sky, clearer, cooler. He went silent of thought, perhaps for the first time in his life—of his own thought, in the thought of another. He stood so a long while, then strode ahead.

I watched him go, slowing my step. He was all too clearly outlined on the illumined road. I saw the empty sleeve hanging, the unbalanced form. It appeared also as an inner form, a kind of spiritual shape that he bore for the time. But also, in his stride and a new higher bearing of his head, there was a lift to be felt out of this shape, a break from it. He was at a time of inner change, not differently from myself, now in its first sharp sense of separateness and its loneliness: the alternate yielding and turning back: the overpride, the underestimation. Now one could best understand him by his

very perversities, for these were but the steps in recoil from his onward striving. From this Zayda might well feel: It is not me he needs now but another.

And now, watching Dirk—suddenly I saw her, this other. Striding there alongside him, one who was in the same pitch of battle, with the same strength for it. One who was active, as Zayda was not: who would come keen to keenness, strong to strength, lonely herself to loneliness; who out of herself might understand him and, understanding, help, or at least not hurt, or isolate farther. I saw the one who would be equal—walking there beside him, holding herself apart from a pride equal to his but still striding along with the same forward activity. I saw the two forms making one, in height and breadth and strength of stride . . . As Dirk turned into the shadow of the lane, out of the full moonlight, I thought: In time he will see it too, so definitely is it pictured!

With such detachment of vision as this with which I saw Dirk—now I saw myself, going the same way. (With that detachment first known on the lane!) As if from another's eyes I watched myself, thinking: There goes Julia Jarrell walking—alone? Yes! Never more alone than in this moment! Does no one walk with her, no phantom even of her imagination, of all that large company of them that she has created for herself? Surely some of these— No! There is no one; even her phantoms have failed her.

But see, she walks with a certain expectation, as if going to meet someone. Is there not someone waiting somewhere, to fall into step with her, at some point of meeting on the way? Oh, look ahead, look ahead! Is there not someone?

The road turns sharply beyond Hayes El; it is dark there, no vision can see into it. It is a turn of destiny, hidden until the time of it arrives. It is not well to see these turns, nor strain to see. Only look upon her who walks . . .

But, looking, I was drawn as seer into the one seen. I became again only what I wanted—I was all-contained in my need. There was no other-vision now of stone and lane and hill beyond, with trees that bore stars in a vast outflowing from them. All these in the moonlight appeared only as a dream image. The sight was unbearable; and I broke from it to climb the hill, all the way to the top, to tread the dream aspect of it away, under my feet; and come to know it all real again through them. All cleared as I went, as if the dead up there were giving it definition. I could be sure of the dead, I felt: of Old Hayes and Cordelia. And of what was dead in me, if not of what must go on living tomorrow. There was security too, in the stones of the wall: I lay flat on it, wanting to mold my image into their very substance, to make it less dream. From here, the moon was directly over me; I was at the nadir of its zenith. But I shut my eyes to it, and pressed farther into the wall. Let it pass, let me see all things without its atmosphere of enchantment. So I lay, until everything in me seemed to take form, substantial as stone, whatever starry radiance this might break into again for me. Then I arose and went slowly down the hill, with all thought and feeling newly formed in this way within me. And as I walked I knew—

—that I wanted love, in all its togetherness: all its meetings in the night, and in the morning its awakening. I wanted the full communion—of hands clasped, feet on the same road walking, and the word spoken being the word understood. I wanted love: as stone *and* star, substance and radiance. In the world pictured around me, I wanted—these hills and their heavens, this house and that hilltop, and all the way lying between. I wanted: the cleared land, the forest; the field under me where it lay smooth and where, rutted. I

wanted what my feet knew and my head. Not alone, but in love, in companionship, in communion. I wanted love! Hands clasped, feet walking the same road, the word spoken and understood, its speaking being its understanding.

And all I had was—a letter written, and not answered.

OCTOBER

Camel at the Needle's Eye

But now October—the month of the earth's true harvest. Invisible reapers went abroad the fields, astride the trees. Grasses that had escaped man's cutting bent to the first frosts; trees shed their leaves to one scything of wind through them. A fine smell of true rot came into the air; earth was redolent with death, but one coming with fertility at its proper time, with the life that is in decay as its dignity and purpose. It was a much richer month than September, although it grew more and more bare. The magic chemistry of fall turned all to gold: prodigal on the ground it lay everywhere.

Berry had gone to town after the first frost; and Zayda was back because no other of Cleony's girls was home, to help us. Janet stayed shut up in her room. Was it against the mellowing beauty of the world widespread around her, or just to menace Father with a threat I heard her make to him: Do you want to drive me to what I tried in Paris? By staying in her room she did bring him often to the question: Where is Janet? And draw him upstairs to see. What did she want of him? She seemed not to know herself. She still said it was to leave this place, she harped on that one string of complaint. But I could definitely feel now that the place was

inside Janet, and she knew it was there. In her words about leaving, there was an undertone of futility to their fear.

For me October was bringing a certain interlude of peace. I fell under its golden enchantment. I could not stay indoors: every flutter of leaf was a signal, every silence of sunny air a calling. In the mood of one golden hour or another, I would lie still of all thought in the warm fields' grasses, or walk to the sudden winds that blew as if they would leave nothing unmoved by them. Zayda understood and waved me away from all housework. She kept tempting me away. Go here and there, she would say, pointing to some tree in the forest or cluster of color on the hills.

One day she said: Go to Lutie's. Her place lies at the very heart of all this color, this time of year.

And she began packing me a lunch for the trip to be made, walking. I hung uselessly about the kitchen as she worked, with certain thoughts crowding into questions, seeking more definiteness. I felt that I could ask them of Zayda where I could not, of Father.

— Zayda, tell me. With all so lovely here, why does Kirtley Hayes stay away? England is just as lovely, of course, but he does have such a feeling for this place.

She answered my thought directly.

Well, she said, there is his wife to begin with: she is worse than Miss Janet about this place, she can't endure it. That alone, perhaps, would not hold him, for there is little enough between them any more . . .

— Any more, Zayda?

— Well, perhaps at first there was something. I don't know. Seeing them together now, you can hardly imagine there ever was anything, Miss Vic is so unfeeling of all that Mister Kirtley feels. But she is very beautiful, and maybe it was this at first. He was pretty young, he met her right after

he went over; she is related somehow on his mother's side. He did just what his father did—went to school in England and married there. But anyway, whatever it was, it has long since passed—you can feel this in the air between them. If it weren't for his children . . .

— Oh, I didn't know! Father knows him only as Captain Hayes.

Two sons, Zayda told me. One was born just after the war—theirs was a war marriage; the other, some years later: he's just a little older than Boy. In between I think they had separated. Mister Kirtley went off somewhere by himself, and that is when he wrote his books.

— Books, Zayda?

— Yes, there were several, of poetry. I just saw one by chance when he was here; he had it amongst his things, and when I was straightening up I saw it. You can trust me not to look at a manuscript, Miss Julia, but never a book published! I had only just opened it, however, when he came in . . .

— Oh! Did he catch you at it?

— He did. But I let him. I asked him outright: Why haven't you told us? He took the book away from me and spoke with an odd kind of sadness there is about him. It really isn't mine, Zayda, he said, it is something that just came to me for a little while and then left again.

— But, Zayda, did you see it at all? What was it like?

— Yes, I saw a little. It was called: Transfigurations. Just that. It was a little strange, but wonderful, the few lines I got to read. It was just of a man walking a road, such a road as this passing Hayes El, and suddenly seeing all things differently.

— Oh, I see!

— Miss Julia, I declare you look as if you do. You look . . .

She looked at me, then away, as I came to myself again, from too intensely following—man on a road, such a road as this passing Hayes El.

I'm afraid, Zayda sighed, what Mister Kirtley said about his book is true of him: things come and go, they are not settled yet. You asked why he doesn't come back—maybe this is your answer. Besides, he would have to leave everything to come; he'd be here alone, with only his sister, and that would be torment for him. Way I see Mister Kirtley is like the Rich Man of Scripture—Camel at the Needle's Eye. It is not just wealth he would have to give up, but everything. As I have told you—Old Hayes was Camel come, too, before he died; Brent's birth brought him to it. Drake was his way of trying to get through. Only trouble was, Drake was born through the Eye, but Old Hayes had to die this side.

But then Zayda herself broke all this flow my question had released: But you'd best be starting if you aim to get back by evening! It is a good six miles each way, cross country, and it's warm, and you're dreamy to start with.

So I set out, in culottes and shirt, hair bound widely to the wind that was blowing to bring the last clinging leaf down, and with Zayda's lunch cool and damp within oiled paper under my arm.

The day was all one metamorphosis of gold: one to light in the sun's rays, to liquid in the ponds, to dust in the leaves on the ground. I crossed the cut meadows, taking fences where by the summer's end they were low with brunt of horn or rub of back against them; dropping into cornfields with their green barriers down, my going slow to the loose furrows, but soft, and the way clear before me. I took dis-

tances and directions never tried before, the spring too wet for them, the summer too thickly grown. Cross-country, by way of the church in the hollow . . . But here in the silence of the week lying deep to the talk of Sunday, I was caught and held almost unto going no farther.

If Lutie's place was at the heart of the year now, here was the vein leading to it. All the graves lay reburied in leaves, floral with red and yellow, not quiet and in place, but breathing and rising. The shadow of the trees' bare branches danced nudely on the white walls of the church to the singing chorus of their leaves under them. I was borne down upon their carpeting, a life-in-death sense overcoming me: of beat of sun through bare branches, clarity of blue above, endless arch of space over all time, bodies living and dead, mine or those in the graves behind me—no difference; body not that which lives of itself, only something containing life; life now for me as for the leaves, something *outside*. All barriers went down in my mind, and with them all substance settled to the earth as dust, the bright pollen dust of the leaves around me; and then, overhead in that world-arch of a wonderful clarity and the color blue, I arose, space-free of Time, into a new dimension of being. For a long magic moment I lived unfettered in it, as Zayda lived in herself . . .

Zayda began talking through me—all she had ever said, things it seemed that she had still to say. Now with the time divisions down, I could not tell what I was remembering, and what anticipating: her imagination wholly possessed me, as if it had built itself out of the elements of this place, and I had entered it. It centered now to the parable of the Rich Man. The figure moved imageless in my mind, true to the character of the figures in parables. For, when you speak of the Prodigal Son, do you picture the son himself? Do not

the words, rather, live in themselves, and enact their meaning directly in the thought, needing no reference or image? Perhaps one sees a shadowy picture of a man going forth, as the prodigal, and wasting, and then falling, and at last crying: I will arise! But the words, the words! They stand before every image, their sound in the soul goes before all vision. I will arise, I will arise! The prodigal is not out there as another, but within oneself, as one's Self. Parables are imageless like music in the mind; like movement in the blood; like experience in the soul. So now was Zayda's Rich Man. The words stood: What lack I yet? spoken with sense of want in the midst of fullness. And the answer came: Go, and sell, and come, and follow—each word an act, difficult and all-life decisive. Whether true of Kirtley Hayes or not, or of any one man or another, they were true of Life, in Time: they spoke the very command of the year, to shed its fruition unto death. The words stood, not quite imageless in the mind: they took the form of the bare trees, casting the gold of their leaves from them . . .

I arose to the picture when, in the wind, it became active, leaves showering upon me. I walked on my way, still Zayda for a long while, hers the inner mood possessing me.

* * *

I had already cut through several fields, going cross-country, when I realized that I was on Hayescroft land. Signs Posted, and Keep Out, and No Trespassing, assailed me on all sides. Fences with taut barbed wire topping them barred the most devious search for weakness in them: I had twice to climb a tree bordering them and drop down on the other side. And there were hedgerows, many of them clipped, giving the look of a gardened enclosure to the meadows, and a sense of it—enclosed, enclosed—sense of that woman at

the gate. Although I remembered the Doberman, and Zayda had told me there was a bull besides, still now that I had come this far I was tempted to go on and see for myself the great inheritance of land that Drake Parker had refused.

But in keeping close to the hedges in one precaution of dog and bull, I missed the house while passing it: only from the rise of the hill beyond did it come floating as a roof into view in the golden haze of its trees. Still, the sight of the land was enough—folding and unfolding around it: I beheld Drake's sacrifice in terms of green fertility and herds and flocks and paddocks of horses feeding upon them. The house would not be his true inheritance in any case, but the Land: the miles of it rolling green to the blue of distance, in curves of ease for plowing, in squares of hedged order for the raising of cattle. A true sacrifice could only be of one's innermost desire: this is why Drake gave up the Land, and made his desire create anew what it wanted. Drake knew the deep requirement! Born *through* the Eye, Zayda said, born on the other side. This meant—free of the possessive sense, wanting only to have and to be what he could create out of himself: refusing even a name, content to be no one but Man born of himself.

I descended the next hill, recalled now from Drake to the earth under me. I had dropped from a fertile field into one that was barren, the slope steep, running in the ruts of erosion into a gully. These hillsides were like the side walls of a house that was crumbling away from a roof kept in repair. Hayescroft was a vast hilltop; but here where I walked was the hill itself. And here structure was collapsing and substance running away. A vivid sense of broken connection came to me—of the unrealized whole; of man, cultivating in himself and outside only what he could see, as if hilltop were hill. Where the break was made, I could see,

Death entered. Life to be Life had to be continuous and whole and wholly organic. Old Hayes knew this of the Land, as few others did. And so Drake.

I had come now to the end of the barren, scarred slope, to a glen wooded, and running with deep narrowed water. In it I was suddenly surprised by a gate leading through a hedge, from field to wood. I was glad enough to find it, and not have a tree to climb to get over the fence. And I went through without a question of why it was just here. On the other side—immediately before me was a house, or something shaped like a house out of branches and vines. In the very instant of my sight of it, a sound came: of a dog's snarling. And then—sight was sound!—and I went blind and deafened to them both, as one—and fell—to one swimming sense of red: the inside of a dog's mouth close upon me, and this the color of his fury. All went red then, a red sheet against my eyes inward.

Thought began to return, with a lift again into the position of standing, as if thought itself were a vertical thing, and unconsciousness horizontal. The red blindness was being shaken from me. It was not my thought, however, but another's, coming in words: You can't be hurt. Here, hold your head up. The dog has only thrown you, you're just frightened.

With each word and pull of hand accompanying it, the darkness within, red-tinged with the color of the dog's tongue and his wrath, was dispelled. When another word came, water, its substance accompanying it, the dog's fury and my fear, one color within me, cooled and cleared to the water's kindness; and I could not but smile at its goodness, and rest back for a moment's comfort upon the hand that upheld me. How good for terror to pass!—for the upward balance to be restored; for thought to take shape again out

of feeling, pervaded by it but not blurred, holding itself in bright outlines of decision. And how good!—voice coming back to the throat, and into it the information of words after a dark unconscious silencing. I felt all gratitude to this goodness, and spoke it with warmth that reflected its sudden ardor upon me, further to restore me.

— Thank you, thank you. I'm all right now, it has passed . . .

I was speaking to no one in my mind, nor to any words spoken to me: just to that sense of balance restored upon which my own identity hung poised with that of all living comprehensible things. For a moment longer I rested with closed eyes. Then, opening them . . .

It must be imagination—sudden—an unconscious picture rising, of many months' inward picturing from that first day when Father found the photograph of the boy. Or maybe it was this, giving a man's form to a woman's face, hers, at the gate. Thought could play a trick like this, active as mine was, through so many months, with only the inner image to build upon. It must only be the woman at the gate, her voice and her hand, her face with its long stroke downward, its high one of eyes crossing . . . I must still be a little unconscious . . .

Yes, now as I opened my eyes again, as consciousness came back on a clearer tide, I could see definitely: it was the woman, it was Brent Hayes' wife.

There *was* a sign, she was saying. And you *were* trespassing. And I *had* told you about the dog.

She spoke with a searing kind of coldness, in a white heat of defense. When to the goad of her words I got up and stood alone with pride against them, she looked relieved—for herself. Then she said words that almost made me faint again.

— My brother has gone for the car to take you home.

She said something else, but I did not hear. *My brother!* Then it was—and before Christmas—and without letting us know! But why? Could he be displeased—maybe with my letters? Oh, why had I written so freely and so fully? It must have seemed strange to him that I and not Father . . .

He will come by the road, she was saying now. If you could walk there . . .

In a moment he will be here, and I must walk steadily, with pride and detachment from all I have written him, as if it were only something dictated by Father. There must be no hint—out of myself to him.

— Shall I help you to the road?

— No, I am all right. If you'll just show me the way—there is such a tangle.

She pointed to a leaf-covered path through the thicket.

I hear the car, she said.

I also. I mumbled some sort of thanks to her and walked on, holding myself together tightly. The car was there on the road. I did not look up.

Sorry to trouble you, I murmured. I think I might walk it.

My voice scarcely came, and it was dry. And so his, answering.

— Five miles?

I did not look up; I just got in the door he had opened and slid into the seat beside him. He bent, before starting the car, to light a cigarette. I stole one glance. Yes! The face of the boy, only more drawn to the center stroke of the features. Brow high to receding hair, and somehow enlightened—a little like Clive's, though stronger—with something of the cast of Drake about the eyes.

But then he turned. I could not quite meet his glance. What would he see, oh, what would he? What of all I had written him? And oh, if I had only been dressed differently, not blown in this way, hair half bound and half loose, and if I were not in this way flushed and faint!

I am Kirtley Hayes, he said. And you? Julia Jarrell, of course.

His voice was coming differently, with breath more deeply taken—with a constrained but threatening fullness of feeling in its tone. Out of all I might have cried to him—why have you come? why didn't you let us know?—only this answer came to what he had said about who I was:

— Yes, but I wish I might not be, now that you've come!

He slowed the car a little, and was slow with his answering question.

— But why not?

In his voice was a little rise of amusement, a lightening, as if to put me more at ease. I could feel him striving for this himself, but with a practiced effort, quiet and deliberate. I was only able to speak as I felt, only so—no other way possible.

— Surely you can understand how I must—how I am in a way of being surprised and, well, self-conscious before you because of all I have written, that I presumed you'd want to hear.

Again, slow, his answer, but frank and sincere when it came.

— Yes, I can understand, for I'm somewhat in the way of feeling that way myself after what I wrote your father.

But then he went silent, and his silence was difficult: its very depth and sincerity—they seemed almost unsurmountable from my side. It stood with all that was between us—his feeling about Hayes El and my response to it. I felt so

small and isolated beside it. Was this not the way Lutie felt (the likeness came with a shock) that day in the car beside Drake? Yes, there was something of Drake, something that was—whole: a certain intactness, not formidable, not so powerful and certain as Drake's; yet the same sort of spiritual integrity. He seemed unable to speak except from it.

I had to let him break the silence: it was impossible from my side. At last he did, when we had covered half the distance to Hayes El.

As a matter of fact, he said, I didn't think I would look in on you at this time, at all. And I was almost afraid to come for that visit later.

Now the question was invoked from me: But why? Surely you could trust Father to understand every living thing you wrote.

But this reference to the Letter drove me again to silence. He must know, of course, that I had read it, for it was all involved in my answers; yet actually to speak of it, to present myself as one to whom he had confessed himself, beside Father . . . (Oh, actually, actually to be here with him, to have him here, to be talking, to be using voice and hand! I did not dare fully to realize the actuality: I had to hold some of it off, and try to imagine myself merely sitting here and writing to him, and having him write back—to Father.)

Perhaps, he said, it is myself that I am not wholly trusting.

And then he went silent again, though not so silent as before. I began now to hear his voice, as if in reverberation—the voice itself, apart from what he had said. I heard in it two tonal influences: one slightly alien, a British clip of consonant; the other familiar, in Father's own voice—the soft and long-drawn vowel of Kentucky. The contrast

was odd but it suited him: it expressed all that was definite in what he said, when he decided with deliberation to speak; and also what was extended of feeling from this, into indefiniteness. More and more I thought, he would use the drawl of Kentucky, as we would be able to speak to each other without explanation. I could imagine the full charm of his voice, in ease and fluency, when the constraint of strangeness would fall before all that was known between us. This kept coming back to me: what he had written to Father, and what I, to him. All I had written!—pouring my whole self into it without restraint. Now I had to speak of this, my thought flooded into speech.

— But you must tell me, did I presume too far in what I wrote you? I meant only to write for Father, but when I sat down to it, it all just overflowed, as it were.

He considered this, seriously and earnestly, but with these moods mingled now with a kind of amusement taken in my naïve kind of outbursting. I was indeed naïve to the moment, born in it, of all I was feeling. (I was a little amused at myself: I, Julia Jarrell, naïve? after all the sophistication of those four books?) I could see that he meant to answer me with the truth. I had asked for this, but could I bear it? Which bear better—to have him say that I did presume, or that I did not?

He was looking at me. I forced myself to look back, into the eyes. I saw there—a kind of searching, as if for my own integrity, the truth of what I had written. His eyes were asking: Was it true of you, did you know what you wrote, did you live it? I could only look my answer as it existed in me. My glance fell, however, to his reply that was—the harder one to hear.

— You wrote nothing but what I had to know about everyone here, and about yourselves, you and your father.

I thought of you together, at first. Later, when you began to write more out of yourself, I thought of you bound up in what you wrote. You must allow me a little surprise now in finding you—well, separate from both your father and your words.

— If only you will allow me this!

My words ejaculated themselves out of my need of this allowance, in finding him separate from the words of that Letter. Living, and here beside me! Still I could not permit myself to realize it fully: not look enough to see all the features. I had to keep him in the picture of the boy a little longer, and in his likeness to Clive and Drake. Yet it could not be much longer, with him speaking in a voice with tone, and such tone, with so much warmth in it.

Well now, he was saying, with that over we can get on. Tell me about your father. I might as well stop in and see him, now that I've run into you.

He was speaking lightly, with a resilience of ease which sprang, it seemed, from the very depth of his seriousness, as a kind of relief for it. I became more able to look toward him, as if, indeed, something were 'over' between us. And I saw—still something of Drake and Clive; more of Clive just now, of his sort of fatigue about the eyes when they were trying to understand about Cordelia. But also I saw something that was all of himself, as he had written this into the Letter. Only a little of this could I allow myself: it came with such shock of finding him like so many words made flesh. Only one glance at the long slender hands on the wheel—hands that had written that letter and the books Zayda had spoken of. Or at the slender profile turned to me, the hair standing high to a very high forehead, fluffed in the wind; the nostril and mouth sensitive, with one quiver of some continuously active inner sensitivity. Or at the

whole head bent, as if with a burden of thought. To find him!—with hands and a face and a long body, slender and full of grace; and here beside me; and presently standing, and walking—toward Father. When I would see him with Father all of the Letter would come alive. Words made flesh? It was so, it was having words breathe and make movements of hand and head, turning to look at me . . .

He was looking at me, with a not different question and wonder.

Are you by any chance, he asked, not only the Colonel's daughter but the author of some books that came out a few years ago?

Oh, please! I cried. It is torture for me to hear of them. They belong to a past in my life that is as over as if I had died to it.

I wondered, he said, after it finally dawned on me that you were someone yourself writing those letters. Vic had your books—they were quite the vogue in London for a while: young America speaking.

I went vehement about those books: But I tell you that Jay Jarrell is dead!

He smiled outright at me: All right, we'll let her rest. But do tell me this—did she die here at Hayes El?

— No, just before, in Dirk's accident; but she got buried here and—resurrected.

Good! he said, with some satisfaction of his own. And then he added lightly: We'll let her rest, for we'll have all we can do with the one living here, as it is.

— In keeping her from being embarrassed, yes!

— Oh, I think we're getting around that all right, don't you? Here we are, not more than five minutes out, and we are over the worst of it. But tell me, where were you going when you were caught trespassing?

— To see Lutie and Drake.

To this he went silent, in a depth that seemed to lie below all that was between us. Over me flooded the content of his silence: what I had written, of Drake and Lutie! It came to me in a new connection—with his sister. My inward wringing of my hands was in my voice as I cried:

— Oh, I am sorry. When I wrote of them I only associated you with El Farm, not with your sister. You were really only a kind of alter-ego at best, in all I wrote. And this about Drake and Lutie—this seemed so wonderful, the essence of everything here, the living promise . . . Oh, what am I saying? Is it something I should not? Tell me!

For I was talking now against a silence that was almost absolute in him. He had, besides, turned his face away: I could not even see the quiver about his mouth, of one feeling or another; and nothing of the eyes.

Please, I cried, tell me if I went too far in what I wrote you, in what I said about everything. Just say 'too far,' and I'll go back and be—formal or conventional or any way you like. Only tell me!

He was struggling in himself for ease: for lightness to transcend all that was involved, was contained, within the words standing between us. I had but added to it with every word I had said! I ground my teeth down on this, all of it, from the beginning. Why couldn't I have stayed out of that content of my letters until I was sure it was understood between us, and reconciled to all that existed as difference from it? Now I thought for the first time of his other relationships, not to Hayes El: to wife and sons, and a life elsewhere, a whole life, years and years of it. . . . I could not think through these, only of them—brokenly, distantly, without much reality to stand against his being here, I with him; and not only with words but with a feeling that

reached deeply into us both and was trembling between us for its appeasement.

I felt that I could never again speak to him, if he were not the first to speak. He was slow, as before, with his answer; and slower, as if the effort to break his own silence were greater. But when he spoke at last his voice was quiet, though it was more with constraint than with ease. And his words were not evasive.

— Perhaps in that letter you did go too far, or at least farther than I would have expected even your father to go, understanding Drake and this—this essence of Hayes El of which you speak. And even farther than I had clearly gone myself. Lutie, at least, was unexpected, and Drake in connection with—love. It all did recall Old Hayes somewhat too—well, too essentially, to use your own word. But, however far it is, we can't go back now; we'll just have to let it stand as written and read and—understood on my part.

This was his reassurance!—bringing with it, again, something newly involved: the depth of feeling from which he was speaking, and his words 'too far, farther than I myself had gone, but let it stand as written and read and understood.'

But now I was not certain in myself how it had been written, or read, or understood!

We had come into sight of Hayes El, and suddenly he stopped the car.

— You haven't told me about your father, yet, or the rest of you. But now that we've come this far, I'd better face this for myself. I said I didn't mean to see you at all this time; I really came only to attend to some business for Aggie. But as a matter of fact I did pass here last night; I had to. It was late, there was only a light in the room against the hill. Tell me, who has taken that?

New sources of rue!

— I'm afraid I have, but Zayda seemed to think it was all right.

He smiled broadly: Then it is, for Zayda knows more about these things than any of us. She probably saw you right off as another daughter of Old Hayes. But do tell me now about something I can't wait to see—the mare!

My answer to this was—the mare herself, coming toward us! Father riding, in the comparable peace of a Kentucky evening! I just pointed. When he saw, he said nothing: it was too much, Father *and* the mare. He just drove on toward their approach . . .

We reached the gate a few moments before them. As Hilda came, he was lost even to Father, in her. And I with him!—in the sound of her hoofs, the slender legs, the throw of feet, arch of head, her biting at the bit, the glare in her forward eyes, sun on her mane and her flank and her tail . . .

But when Father brought the mare to a stop, and dismounted, and came toward us leading her, and he had himself gotten out of the car to go toward Father: then, all else was forgotten, all . . .

— Captain Hayes!

— Major Jarrell!

It was that other evening. But I was not in it. In this meeting I could in no way participate: it was only between them, and not here but in that other time and place.

Father had dropped Hilda's rein; and she was about to make a plunge for the lane when I caught it, to hold her for them, when they would remember. She was their first thought when they came back to the moment. Father made a gesture toward her, and Kirtley took the rein from me, not seeing me, only Hilda.

— So this is the mare.

Yes, Father said with all his approval of her: Yes, and she's a lovely horse. Here, Hilda!

Now he took the rein and jerked her head up for Kirtley to see—the long head, the forward eyes, and those nostrils! Kirtley took one full long look at her; then he laid his hand on her neck for a moment; then he went around and laid it on her flank. Back he came to her head, leaning close, smelling her neck. I thought of Prue's ecstasy of horse.

Much as I'd like to see the rest of you at once, he said with one of his broader smiles, I'll just take a fling up the road on her if you don't mind.

When he was out of sight Father was recalled to me.

— But wherever did you meet him, and how did you know him?

I told him about the Doberman; and this visit being one made only to his sister. Kirtley rode back in one flash of riding as I was telling Father.

Slipping off her, almost in a rapture of riding, he stood before us, all thought of her.

— She *is* a lovely horse, and I've got to have her. Tell Prue I'll give a thousand, no matter what she paid. And you must keep her for me, Colonel, and get her evened out a little more. Then she will be *the* American saddle horse, bone and hoof of Kentucky.

Then he turned from us, even from Father as he looked up the lane. And then, without speaking, he mounted again and slowly rode—to the house.

Road, road! You come back into full existence for me, in seeing him ride in this way!

* * *

Janet had heard us and had come in a flutter. She must have seen us at the gate, and suspected who he was, for she

was all groomed down and arched up into an image of the Colonel's younger wife. She was one exclamation in meeting him.

— But, Mr. Hayes! To surprise us in this way, however nice it is! You should have told us—we are hardly prepared, and in this unseasonably warm weather!

When he reassured her that he was not staying with us, she went off into a diffusion of talk.

— I know I should be thanking you, it was ever so good of you to offer us all a home, but if you could know what we've been through! The accident with the mare, and Larry taking every sort of chance with her, and then that poor woman dying in the orchard! Really, Mr. Hayes, it is all too, too tragic!

Oh, yes, Cordelia, Kirtley said. Miss Jarrell wrote of that. Sad, very, but what a dedication for our orchard! It will be marked forever, as Miss Jarrell wrote, by her immortal image with the apples.

Zayda had only just heard him. She came running and crying his name: Mister Kirtley, Mister Kirtley!

He caught her up and kissed her.

Heavens! Janet smothered the words but I heard her: Heavens, he is kissing her—a servant!

Kirtley cried her name with all the pleasure he took in her: Zayda, Zayda! And how is Boy? Tell me, have you a name for him yet?

Almost, color came into her even whiteness.

— Now, Mister Kirtley, you're not asking me if I am married?

Lord, no! he said. I mean a first name.

Yes, I have, she said. This very day. Mister Dirk has just named him Handy, Little Handy.

And she called the name, down the hall, out the back door.

Boy came, pulling Dirk after him. Dirk had been hiding, from someone new and strange, and especially this one who might think: Poor chap, he needed this year I have given him! Dirk came, hot, and his dark hair ruffled, and his face as red as his lips, and his lips were very red for a man's. He was so handsome in the moment, in this flush of defense against a new pity. I ran to him, I loved him so—suddenly, and with a kind of defense myself, against anything Kirtley Hayes might think of him. Warmly I claimed him, with Dirk's own warmth at this meeting: This is Dirk, my twin. Kirtley Hayes eased his attention away from Dirk then, as if knowing the tension, and fell upon Boy, catching him up in his arms. I saw something—like fatherhood, some related experience to Child—in the way he turned to Boy, and Boy to him.

How about it? he said. Remember me?

Boy shook his head, but threw his arms about Kirtley's neck, and dug his head into his shoulder in a little embrace he had, that was so charming.

That is better than memory, Kirtley said to Zayda. That is immediate acceptance.

Then, a little abruptly, he put Boy down. The child stood like a little lamb that has gone astray and is looking around for the right one to return to. Then he made a dive—not at Zayda, but at Dirk. Now Dirk flushed all the more—with pride of being chosen!

Kirtley went striding through the hall, looking around, murmuring:

— H'm-m. How much more charming! A woman's hand. He looked to me, but I shook my head: No, it is Janet.

I don't do anything but write, or walk around waiting until I am able to write again.

Well, he drawled, just to me: I could have done without the cretonnes, but not those letters.

Then he went out to the back porch, and stood looking up the hill. Now he spoke only to Father, asking: Will you go up with me? I have only a moment, but I can't wait for this until Christmas.

And they went up. He did not turn to me or make any gesture.

I stood on the porch looking after both, Father and him, forgotten by both in their being together. Unheard, Janet came, and stood looking too—after Father. She caught me unguarded, and in the first helpless moment when the realization came. She was as a cat ready to pounce upon the thing coming with its own vividness to me; she had that gleam in her eyes: I have caught you, you have escaped me until now, but now I have caught you!

So this is the way it is! she said. You have had your own hopes of this man! No wonder you have been urging your Father to stay! You have been writing him, waiting only for him to come. I must say, this is a situation! Servants as mistresses, children like Boy and Drake Parker, girls like Prue Tyler, and now you and a man married!

I heard all, but only a few words had meaning. Writing, waiting only for him to come. This was my realization! And she was seeing it, looking into me with a woman's eyes and seeing; but giving it a definition out of herself, not me: one of a woman bound to seek herself in another, her life one effort to bind back to herself what has gone free of her. That definition of woman! In whom love stirs but darkly, with impulse only in the blood; warm unto suffocation; speechless of itself—only a mute throb; and time-weary of

repetition. Woman, without any release of her life from the blind blood-bondage. No freedom from her sex, no selfhood in her self. Woman, without the second birth into such selfhood.

If only I might have seen my love first in my own way: more slowly, and with delicacy for what was so new and tender as yet. But to have to see it through Janet—through all that was so exhausted in her, and defeated! Janet was stronger in this moment, to impose her way of seeing it upon me. She knew her strength and used it; but she did not take any triumph in it. Her despair but became the greater in feeling herself in another; in thinking: You too! Then there is no way out, there is only this kind of standing and yearning after!

No one can bring any kind of knowledge to another without partaking of it himself. Now, as Janet looked into me, she saw herself: both as she was and as she desired to be, in relation to love and life. *I was another mirror to her!* But she only saw herself, not me; and from this she turned and fled—into the house—with such a look as she must have had when she turned from the mirror in that room, and in her vanity . . .

Released by her, I too moved away—back into the house. I went, feeling stunned and empty, into the hiding of the first room I came to. There I sat, tight and hard, in one of Old Hayes' short chairs, trying to get the feeling of someone else, anyone but Janet or myself or any woman. Kirtley came back as I sat there, passing the room, looking in, calling—but only casually, as if only to Janet: Well, goodbye, until Christmas.

I felt nothing in his words said to me, with any promise or expectation.

* * *

And the night was difficult—it brought neither sleep nor awakened seeing. I suffered something like an inward stroke that divided parts of me which had been united, and that left one part senseless, another quivering as with added sensibility. I had to suffer all over again what Janet thought; for now she said it to Father in their room—so hysterically that I heard, even through closed doors. Father made no reply that I could hear; but I could feel his helpless thought: Can this be what I have brought her to? what I created in her by having her write to him?

In the morning early I got up and went outdoors, feeling like Prue: now I felt what I had written of her! (Would I have all my words to live in this way, I wondered, even those of Lutie and Drake?) Part of my impulse was to ride, and to ride Hilda—no horse less swift would do. The rest was to get free of the last adhering likeness to Janet. I would ride over to see Lutie: in her and Drake I would find confirmation for all that other-being in myself (and in him!) that in the moment was failing me. I should have to pass Hayescroft, but it was early and I would ride fast; and I would stay all day and come back after dark, so that I should run no risk seeing him.

The country lay cool with the night still upon the flame of its coloring: with moon full to the rising sun. I rode between the two orbs on the road past Hayescroft: it lay as the very hour described, between morning and night. I let Hilda go as she would, though I was none too good a rider. She went tearing, with that breaking splendor of her speed. For the first time I was on this side of the bright shattering of space I always felt, in seeing her come toward me. I was in the rip and the tear now: narrowly I went, not on the margin of an hour of time, but upon no more than a dividing moment. As Hayescroft on one side fell away from her

feet, Hilda and I were one passing it: I partook of her freedom from all definitions of space when really she struck the speed in her.

We passed the gate. If the Doberman was there, we were already safe from his following. We were going down the hill—almost Hilda stumbled. I pulled her in a little, and she took a certain caution of her own of the grade. We were still going fast when we reached the hidden entrance to the little house but not quite—fast enough—for—he was here! at the road's edge, working on the hedges!

Hallo! he called just before we reached him, having seen us come before he was himself seen.

I dug heels into Hilda; she almost shot out from under me.

Wait, wait! he called more sharply.

But I could not have stopped Hilda if I had wanted to. He must have known both my wanting and my not wanting, for he leaped the hedge just as we started up the next hill.

Whoa there! he called to Hilda with voice of horseman to horse. Whoa, I say!

The British clip to his consonants helped. Hilda heard, or at least hesitated for a moment, in a way she had while still in motion, to decide for herself upon obedience. She was under way of deciding against it when he surprised us both by making a flying catch at her bridle. Almost she threw me, in stopping.

Sorry, he said shortly, from a shortness of breath. But she was almost running away.

We were all quite breathless. He had taken no small risk getting in her way; he was pale from the danger faced and taken.

Or was it you who were running away? he asked, looking his question up at me.

I blurted: I didn't intend to see you this morning. I was only passing this way because I had to.

(If only I could speak anything but the truth to him!)

He was easing away from his first shortness toward that ready humor he felt in my outspoken desperation.

— But I thought we had overcome any need to avoid each other.

He held fast to Hilda, but was patting her now and talking in an undertone that any woman might fain have a man use to her. I felt his meeting of me slip into second place to this sight of Hilda.

— But this is running into you, and I didn't mean to!

He helped me through my embarrassment, smiling, asking offhand:

— Where were you going?

I told him. He went on patting Hilda, and talking to her. She was lifting one foot in a way I did not notice, but he did, and he bent and held her hoof, searching for the trouble.

— There's a small stone somewhere, he said. Then all the rest was Hilda as he took out his knife and went looking for it. He was very deliberate: I suspected that he was deciding upon something in himself.

Yes! When he looked up at last it was to say: May I go with you? on Hilda, I mean, if you wont mind one of Brent's horses. It will be a nag by comparison, but I'd like to try the mare out just once more.

It was all Hilda again, but it relieved me.

I'll be gone but a moment, he said. Will you dismount and wait? She doesn't stand well, does she? You could wait at the little house; there is no one, the dog is tied up and Agnes is still in bed.

I swung off and stood feeling a little odd, as always in dismounting—shorter, compressed toward the earth. He

held Hilda's bridle and stood immediately in front of me, looking and smiling . . .

— You seem smaller today, somehow.

— And you taller!

— Well, naturally, as you grow smaller I grow taller.

— It is how I feel getting off a horse, and besides it is the clothes: they sort of squash one down.

— It is still a surprise to see you running around, separate from your father, and quite outside a letter.

— I often surprise myself, in being alive outside what I write. It is a way words have with me, of being more real than myself.

Maybe, he said, really thinking about it: Maybe words have more life than we dream they have—our own life in them.

Then he turned to the narrow gate, leading Hilda.

I was glad to see the little house again, to commemorate the spot. It stood in a glen deep of itself but deepened farther now in its golden burial of leaves. The logs of the house layered it to its setting of the horizontal branches of beech trees. It rested upon the bank of a creek, leaning against it rather than standing. Today the creek was dry of falling water; but some was pooled, with leaves as water-flowers floating upon it. The glen was enclosed in a silence of all but leaf-stirring: all sound was transposed into this—that of my movement in walking, and of small birds' flying, and of small winds' blowing.

This was the time of the leaf-sound in the year's symphony of sounds: the myriad of other voices were in subdued accompaniment to the running leaf-melody. Standing here, listening, with all experience sound, I went backward through the months, hearing them all over again, each with the movement and melody dominant to the season. In the

late summer, drill of cicada and basso of frog, with wind instruments silent for these strings and horns. Midsummer, the many-voiced melodies of the birds' full song, thrush in the Forest in solo performing it. Spring: the first flute calls of the birds, singly sounding. Still earlier, before the air sang—the earth voices I had heard in March: the first life-sound of the year, the bleating of the lambs. Returning from all these to the sound of the leaves, I could feel how the animation of the year passed until, all but lifeless now was this stifled whispering. And after it? Empty even of the content of leaf, the wind alone would be left as sole voice of November. Then would come the silence of snow . . .

O speaking and singing Year, leave me one token of sound for this silence to come!

* * *

I moved to the little house, to stir sound again into the silence of time to come. I thought also to commemorate it, to give shape to my memory and some refuge of enclosure. The little house stood there as a kind of shelter from the drifting and the dusting and the whispering away of the year here all around it. And it stood as something that had held him, from which he had made that sudden appearance into this new reality he was having for me. Moving to the house to enter it—I and my heart and my heart's knowledge—hesitant this side of the sill, to cross it: yet I went on in for the shelter, and the feel of the walls, to confine and give embodiment to all that was escaping me.

The room was very small, low-ceilinged, and with windows high and darkened by the eaves widely over them. I could imagine—how cramped he would be here in this small space. There was a chair drawn to the small light of one window, and a stool at a long leg's stretch from it. And be-

side it was a table with a book turned face down upon it. Yesterday, perhaps, he had been here reading, when I came through the gate, and the dog heard me. Had he not come here as to a refuge—from his sister, and Brent, from the whole problem of the land and Brent? (Had not Old Hayes built this as such a refuge for himself?) When I had come, he must have thought, What is this intrusion? and felt me—as intruder. He was so vivid in this room: he filled it up, as with a bodily presence. It was not my own embodiment I found here, but his.

* * *

— Are you ready to go?

I was confused for a moment about his voice: whether it came from within the room where I felt him, or outside. When he called again, I turned, and saw him in the doorway, almost filling it up. He did not come in; I felt him also hesitant on this threshold and—withdrawing from it, onto the porch. I felt: He is outside what I have entered, he has withdrawn even from the way he was here yesterday.

I went out. He stood leaning against one of the crooked, rustic posts of the little porch. This also was very small: in coming out of the door I was immediately before him. Perhaps it was the smallness of the porch, or the enclosure of the room, remembered: whatever it was, I saw him close—and too close!—in the next moment, in every detail of form and feature.

He was in breeches and boots of a blond brown, with a shirt of dark green that lay richly in its color and material against the fairness of his skin and hair. The collar was open, and his throat rose thin and long to the poise of his head. This appeared still longer and thinner in being connected now with his full height, standing. Even more sensi-

tivity was in play about his mouth; and in the eyes, more searching. I saw their color now: dark gray, almost green. (The shirt brought this out to match it.) And I saw, around their brilliance, the setting they had in many fine lines made by tension of thought and vision. The skin was almost taut over these lines, but I could imagine it otherwise. I could imagine all the ways he might look! One of them was tired, very tired, with all these lines deep about his eyes, and the eyes themselves dull. Though he stood freshly groomed, looking young in the moment, I could see him in this tired way, in another situation altogether. How he looked now waved over me in one sense of an embodied attractiveness of what was slender and agile and fair; but this wave came to its ebb in the other way I could see him: as soldier, husband, father, man almost fifteen years older than myself.

The second was the stronger feeling: it brought such compassion that desire in me began to well up—to give myself to his rest, to the end of all his searching. So strongly this came, that almost my hands made its gesture, reaching out to him. When I say that it was desire to give myself, this was not myself as I was yet, but only as I felt a new capacity to be. It seemed to be a self that was enlarging in the moment to meet all his needs of being and becoming. It was a giving far beyond my own power to give, drawn from some fullness into which I had stumbled for a moment. If it was love that I was feeling, it was not yet my love.

— If you are ready to go?

My hands fell to the words repeated. All fullness ebbed away as he turned to go to Hilda and the horse standing beside her. It was a trim-lined horse, and fancy; but without what Hilda had, standing still or moving.

— This is Brent's idea of a horse: has all the life bred out of it. He bought it probably from a paper pedigree,

without looking at the horse. You're sure you won't mind if I—?

— Hardly, for I'm not a good enough rider for Hilda.

I mounted quickly. He swung a long and loving leg over Hilda. She waited upon him but trembled toward movement.

You have the makings of a rider, though, he smiled. You couldn't be your father's daughter and not sit right in a saddle. You're just a little preoccupied *from* riding, that is all.

He was on, but he was holding Hilda still.

She must learn to wait, he said. You won't mind my giving her a little discipline as we ride?

I could tell that this ride was to be Hilda first: his words and his preoccupation *with* riding informed me. But it was a relief to have it so; and it gave me happiness besides to see him so far restored to his boyhood. Soon he was riding far ahead, for Hilda could only be held in so far: her walk left Brent's horse several lengths behind, and her canter was a gallop compared to his. When Hilda went into her rack I dropped out of sight entirely, though I put Brent's horse to the most he could do with whatever gait he chose for himself. Should he have decided to run away he could not have caught up to Hilda! All life bred out of it indeed, bought from paper!

He was riding back toward me—Hilda's staccato feet informed me. Breathless, laughing, his thin fine hair ruffled to fullness about his brow, he came flashing up over the next to the last hill to Lutie's as I began slowly to climb it.

— I'm afraid we were awfully rude, Hilda and I; but we did have to take our full stride together just once. Now I'm going to ride alongside you, I've tired her into walking, and you must prepare me for Lutie and Drake.

And he bore down on Hilda's bit, holding her alongside. . . .

Close again—and with him warm and flushed, his shirt wet—his whole face in the body's action, at its pleasure—oh, dear life! always to be immediately present in this way, warmly and closely embodied! No past or future, just one close warm riding together, with Hilda's pulse giving its tempo to all life, the year itself stopping at this season (going no farther into that waiting silence!) and catching and keeping this tremble and quiver that was Hilda's . . .

Now, he said, now tell me about them.

— But what can I tell you, that I have not already written?

— Tell me that. I've been afraid, since I know who you are, that it was just something written.

— No! No, in what I wrote to you of Hayes El there is no difference between the written and the spoken word. This isn't true of other things I've written, but it is of Hayes El.

— I took it that way, like so many words spoken to me. Please believe, I'm not doubting them or you, only trying to realize it all actually. As well as I know Drake, it will be different, seeing him in the light of what you have written about him and—Lutie.

He mused, almost to himself: Words live in their own way, and perhaps the fullest and most lasting. Still, when they come to life there is a certain shock—as there has been, seeing you. And now Lutie . . . It is so hard to imagine Drake with any woman equal to him.

It isn't that she is equal, I said, trying to prepare him for Lutie: Only that she permits him to be all he is. I don't think any woman could add to Drake; but almost any other one might have taken something away.

We had reached the top of the hill. From here I could

point Drake's place out to him: on the crest of the next one we had to climb. He asked how much land Drake had bought; and when I told him he exclaimed:

— A hundred and fifty, while Brent has four thousand! I pointed out the difference in the look of Drake's land ahead of us, from the unkempt wildwoods we were passing.

— You can see where his hand has been. It is all so whole, so connected. This is his greatness. It is practical, but also is in his mind. Were he to write it, it would make a magnificent all-inclusive philosophy and science combined.

Now with the house and land close before us he stopped. He had not seen the place since it had become Drake's: it was one of the few strips, he said, that Old Hayes had not tried to buy, because of the difficulties of its cultivation. I saw it differently today, as if from his eyes. Before, when I had come to visit them, Drake and Lutie were large in my mind, standing before all else, even Drake's genius with the land. But now it was the Land: order of field and of woodland; the taut perfection of fence; each young tree with a protection of an older; each pasture with its requirement of shade and sun; the many hedges and borders and strips of grassland around the plowed earth; a young and an old orchard interspacing each other; a vineyard groomed against a hill; a garden protected from frost, still green and flourishing, of late corn and bean plantings, peas, and tomatoes staked fully to the sun for late maturing. These were aspects of it; but they only bore outward an inner thriving and blending that came peculiarly from it: a vital thriving for the late year, a subtle blending of the living green to the dying brown of things grown with an accurate sense of season. The hand at work here had grasped the whole year's capacities.

He too saw it all inwardly, and in terms of Drake's capacity.

Drake Parker is undefeated by time, he said. He lives inside it, he grows things out of it. Yes, he is the true son of Old Hayes—just such a farmer Old Hayes was, just such a man of the earth.

He started then to ride ahead a little, and I felt myself drop away from a time in his mind that was recurring . . .

* * *

Lutie came running to our approach, to break the shock of it for Drake. She waved, and ran, with her hand against the flutter of her heart, as she seemed to foresee who it might be, who was coming with me.

I was glad she was looking so pretty, in one of her short dirndl frocks, a bit of kerchief on her curls. She recognized him somehow.

It is Kirtley Hayes, isn't it? she cried at first sight. And held out her hand. He took it, in both of his, and looked and looked . . . I thought: He too might have loved her, he and Drake in the same way. And I felt again how adorable she was, in being adored: how lovely, with love. When I suffered a certain pang, it was not envy, just a simple wanting-to-be in myself so far a woman dedicated to love as Lutie was.

He looked almost ready to embrace her. If he had swept her into his arms and kissed her, it would have been quite within the inner picture I had of their meeting. She looked at everyone as if to find something of Drake in him. And she seemed now to find this, in Kirtley.

Her thought at once was of Drake.

Oh! she cried. I wonder if he will remember. But I must prepare him. Will you wait here until I call to you to come?

We went no closer, standing by our horses. He took a pipe out of his pocket as if with sudden leisure felt, a mood of contemplation. He offered me a cigarette and held a match for it; but he did not look at me through the flame, but kept his eyes lowered of their thought of Lutie. Yet he spoke it fully, after a moment's silence—half to himself, contemplatively; but in a way free and full of personal confession.

— It is strange, how much of a man's life is a return to the simplicity of the heart. Drake has gained time on all of us by never leaving it in the first place. Not in love either. He held fast to that too, and his gain is Lutie. Yes, I can see, what you have said of her is true: she is the one woman in the world for Drake; she is this simplicity itself—of the heart.

She is lovely, I murmured: it was the most I could say of Lutie.

— Yes, lovely. And one can say that of so few women, meaning it as you do, as you wrote it in your letter. Do you know, I should give that letter back to you and let you make a love story out of it.

— I should not need it. I think I could write it—out of myself.

— From your own imagination of love?

He put the question with so much detachment that I was able to answer it, also in this way.

— Yes, I think I must always have had this imagination of it, though I wrote so very differently of it before.

— You mean that your despair of it before, that was in your books, was only one taken of this hope?

— Yes, it must have been. I am beginning to see that most of our denials have in them the germ of a future faith. But you promised not to recall those books!

— You regret them too much. I remember sharing their despair—it was one common to the time.

— Too common! I tried to find nothing for myself, I took all as discovered.

— You were at the age of finality. Their chief fault was their youth.

— But I should have kept still until I had something to say!

— You think that now you have?

— Yes, only I have discovered that it isn't something of my own, but belongs to—to the thing itself that I am writing about; it is only mine in so far as I enter into the thing itself.

I grounded.

— There! That isn't finding words for it.

He kept smiling around his pipe, probably at something still felt to be pretty youthful. With the perfect ease of the mood he was in, he put another question in a way that I could answer it.

— This is how you are able to share their love?

— Yes, it isn't that I hope to make it mine, but rather to make myself into it. There is a difference.

— All the difference between identifying oneself with the world, and the world with oneself.

But now Lutie was returning, was running—she could not walk, so eager, so outreaching . . .

I think it will be all right, she said. He was not disturbed, he has been so much less disturbed lately by things coming in from the outside. Oh, I think, really I think, he is going to get better!

We walked from the road to the front of the house where Drake was still working.

Just go slowly with him, she said to Kirtley. Don't strain his memory. Keep to the present of everything if you can—that is the only time he knows—or to the past things that are present.

That means, he said, that I can talk of everything, for it is all here, still here.

But we had come upon Drake, raking leaves. He did not look up. Lutie ran to him. Then he—at once, his whole being lighted up and opened, directly as a plant to the sun. She ran into his arms.

Darling, she said, they are here: the people to look about the place, how you are building it up.

He answered, with more words than I had ever heard him use: They can see for themselves. It is only a matter of understanding the land, one thing in relation to another.

Kirtley spoke with decision into this, saying: Yes, only a matter of understanding; but that is precisely what we seem to have lost about the land and everything.

This thought his own, Drake went on, without feeling interruption (while Lutie flashed Kirtley a glance of approval): Take woodland. A man will either cut it down or let it run wild to its own destruction. At most his idea of preserving is neglecting. He calls it resting, land resting in grass, woods resting in undergrowth. It is only his own rest he is talking about.

From the way Lutie looked we could see that all this was more than Drake had ever said to anyone but her since his accident. She stayed pressed against him, as if to give him this bodily reassurance of her presence; but she let Kirtley carry on what was said.

That is surely true of renters, he said. You should see my place. It is, as you say, either stripped or left to run wild.

Where is your place? Drake asked, with brow drawn to the effort of asking a question—his first! Lutie's look flashed, of another.

Now she grew a little anxious. Was this not pressing him too far? But Kirtley was in some stride within himself, calm and confident. I could believe that it might be from some inner identification of himself with Drake that even Lutie could not share.

It is just down the way a piece, he said. Wish you could come down some time and look over some of the woodland.

I'll come, Drake said, and he started to walk away, with his rake.

Now Lutie was uncertain: never did he go anywhere without her. But Kirtley framed his lips to the woods: Try it! And he swung into a stride beside Drake, saying: It isn't far if we cut down this hill.

Actually they were going—Lutie stood, trembling . . .

— Oh, Julie; can I trust it? But I must not encourage Drake's dependence upon me. I must give him back to life!

Now I could see all the anguish of her great love: the having and the giving up. For now I had in myself the first intimation of that pained bliss of love that comes at the point where it passes personal boundaries and expands into the larger reaches of itself. I could foresee in Lutie the long way I had to go in love, to sustain for long such a state in myself.

We worked on together in the leaves, and we talked; but Lutie was not with me. Once or twice she returned with a warm, personal: Oh, Julie, I'm so sorry, but I . . . Yet I knew she was not absent with Drake, but rather was holding herself away from him, to let his mind waken to what Kirtley would be showing him. This was the Land, in its whole scope of meaning to him, in all his memory of it.

They were gone almost until noon. Lutie and I kept on working, until the lawn was swept like a room, and all the leaves carefully piled for rotting. They came striding back as easily as they had gone, Kirtley with his pipe, Drake with the rake over his shoulder.

The trouble is, Kirtley was saying as they came, you have told me so much I'll have to write it down.

It's already written, Drake answered. I tell Lutie what I know, she writes it down. Show him the words for it, Lutie. She is the one who makes knowledge out of what I know.

I must go now, Kirtley said, but I will come again for the words of it. Goodbye now, Drake.

He held out his hand. But Drake did not understand, he had forgotten this gesture. He was indifferent to the word goodbye; he was tired now from all the effort of thinking he had made. He went over to the porch and sat down, leaning against a post and closing his eyes. Lutie's eyes followed him with anxiety; but she left him alone, and walked back with us to our horses.

Here Kirtley made that gesture, lifting her to her feet, and kissing her. She accepted him as he offered himself, almost clinging to him.

It may be a long time, he said, but I will come again, Lutie. Preserve those words for me, for they are a living knowledge.

Oh, Kirtley! she cried softly. If you might be the one to bring him back!

* * *

We rode back, silently, until we were almost at the gate. I had begun to suffer a panic of loss, recalling those words: It may be a long time. Even though he were to come Christmas, must it not be, after that, a long, long time? Time began to beat a mute demand within me.

See here, he said suddenly, I've been a dull companion, but all this was a lot to take in. And it has been forced upon me unexpectedly—by the Doberman. You first, and then Drake as he is, and Lutie.

We were at the gate. He dismounted, and stood offering his hand to me, to help me dismount. If only in the sun he had not looked so—so bright and warm and immediate! His presence was so much warmer than thought was, it had so much more breath in it than words had. If only he might have remained for me a Letter, not this living image!

He jumped me down, and I turned hurriedly to Hilda. But she was so tall! and I so far compressed. And she was restive to go, and I faint for going. I leaned against her, unable to make the leap into the saddle. He bent toward me, putting a hand upon my arm.

— Are you feeling small again?

I nodded: Yes, and Hilda has grown so tall.

— Let me give you a lift up. She is tall, and you are small, small as Lutie.

I put my foot into the stirrup, but fumbled. He put his hands to my waist and gave me a quick and clever lift. I sprawled across the saddle without all grace.

— All right now?

But I could not find the stirrups. He had forgotten to readjust them to my height. Laughing at my plight, he went about shortening them while I pressed backward out of the way. He caught each foot and placed it for me. Then he looked up and held out his hand.

— Now then, goodbye, but only until Christmas.

He had been all one flowing ease, one mood of gentle amusement. But as he took my hand I felt a certain tightening. It may have been—only because Hilda was restless to be off; she was backing and stepping sideways. For a long

moment his grip on my hand held against her. At first it seemed absent-minded of me, as if with thought of where he would be himself, in this time until Christmas. But then his eyes sought mine and then—just for an instant—singly I, I as myself, grew in identity as he looked, his eyes seeming to create me out of what they saw. And I was pierced through with a sense of recognition exchanged. And with the thought: This is a meeting, not a parting! Between us now, as it took place between him and Father. *It is the same kind of meeting!* But it is between us, apart from Father. This is something all my own, apart from Father.

The smile had vanished from his face. It was older now, older even than I had imagined it under its greatest strain. His eyes stared at what they saw in me: they did not yet receive or respond, they only saw. And they took strength away from his hand. Hilda was able to pull away: it was she who broke gaze and grip. And she took the bit from my hand too, and backed into the road, leaped a little on her hind feet, and then took the plunge.

He called nothing after me, yet I heard a word breathed the whole way back: Until, until!

The word Christmas did not follow. It will be longer, I thought as I rode. I must prepare myself for a time much, much longer. Yet it will be, it has been born to be in this moment, I as myself have been born to it.

And I realized out of all my past intuitions: This is the birth in this place! It is the one here for me, as for Zayda and Prue and Lutie and Cordelia—as it is theirs, it is mine!

But then, remembering Cordelia . . . Oh, dear life, let it be one into life, not death!

NOVEMBER

Shadow Going Before

Grim to an event timed in them, the November days grew from a wan glimmer of sun by noon into one gray of morning and evening. Too warm to snow, too cold to rain, the air held dampness unprecipitated, with a fine filtering chill to it from which there was no escaping. For weeks, all of October, the event had been advertised on the poles and the posts of the pike, in the lure of big red printing: To Be Sold at Auction, Land, House, and All Possessions of Eldora Goddard. We read and wondered: Why had she chosen November? Why add the sackcloth of its gloom to the ashes of her life? We had heard that she meant only to rent out the place, keeping its possessions to the end; but now—Zayda said—she was finding this possession too empty, she could no longer bear to live in this form of her past life wanting all living substance. She meant to move out of the state entirely, and that, before Christmas.

I could understand Zayda's words 'empty form' only from past voids of my own living, not from one present. For, under the gray of this November and within its cold—though outwardly I suffered both—a newly vivid and active experience was taking its own place in me: it was a memory, but one that relived itself with immediate sensation. All the

gray around me was but a thin surface that broke to color within: the cobalt-blue of a wagon, a sorrel team, Lutie's hair, the jade of Prue's breeches, red apples, yellow leaves, a green shirt . . . And all forms shone with an added light of meaning: Zayda rising from the pool, Cordelia's hands lifted to a tree, Drake on a haystack, Cordelia in the wheelbarrow, and myself on Hilda while below me, looking up . . .

Yes, and the sounds were not silent though the wind was blowing hollow now, with no voice but its own. In the deepest silence of the frosted nights I could hear—the heart beat and the blood flow in the winds of March; lambs bleating; the cry of horse-pain through a splash of water; rain on a rock; leaves falling and a word spoken, 'Until!' And there was an unflickering and undimmed glow of warmth within me, though bodily I shivered and chilled with the others, as the stored dampness of leaves in the Forest bore down with the hill upon us, and fogs and mists came rolling up the Valley from the River, blinding sight from all its windows. All Berry had said of November at Hayes El was true enough; and I knew the full gloom of it; yet this only gathered to the inward vividness to make it the brighter. I bore my warmth secretly protected by complaints of the cold as frequent as Janet's; but these were as miserly protests of poverty made against a hidden hoard of gold. The gold of October! All its light seemed to be sealed within me; and in this light images shone clear and clearer. Deeper and more deeply to life all things of the year seemed to come, until I began to suffer a new suffering: of a teeming fullness to which I could give no expression.

Empty form, wanting living substance? How could this be so of her life, though all had died for her? No, I thought, it is not what has died that has left her so empty, but all that has never come to be. It is not because Ben has died

for her, but because he has never lived. Now at the end she knows what it is she has fled in Old Hayes: Life itself. However much she might have suffered through him, she would at least have had her suffering left now to enliven her! (This I knew of the Widow Goddard, from something known of myself, newly.) Out of the state entirely, she meant to move, Zayda said. But where did she think to go? Did she think, like Janet, that she could flee Time itself, or life or death in it?

At first I thought I would not go to the sale, I could not bear it for her. But Zayda said: No, you go, Miss Julia. It will be something of the year and this place to remember. And, besides, you must try to buy in *some of her canned goods, she is going to sell even that!* (The italics are Zayda's, they were in her voice.) She is famous for this, Zayda explained. Never a Fair but she takes the first prize. Oh, you must go, if for nothing else but the canned goods!

Zayda was staying with us now, in the house, with Little Handy. Cleony had come down with one of her major 'hitches' in her hip, and could not even come to cook. Zayda was doing all the work, running fleet from one thing to another, even carrying Janet's meals up to her when her neuralgia intensified with the cold, and her complaints against it. The house had two furnaces, one for each wing; but its so-called central heating was all too central to the region of the furnace room and the one above it: the wings took cold flight as from the warm body of a single room, with air pouring through the walls as if they were paper. We moved from one wing to another as the winds changed direction. If it were going to be a cold winter, as Zayda herself was beginning to fear, whatever would we do?

Janet was almost demanding of Father that we go to town for the worst months at least. But he only said over and

over: We must stay through Christmas, in case Kirtley Hayes comes then. He and Dirk went about cutting wood incessantly; for it was clear we should need a fire in each room in addition to the furnaces. They tramped the Forest through, looking for dead trees, marking them for weeks ahead of labor. Janet fretted about Zayda's being in the house, with Dirk . . . But Dirk was never in except for meals and to sleep, shortly after dark. With Little Handy for a guide he went plunging into the woods for the whole day, every morning after breakfast, even when Father could not go because of Janet. Toward Zayda he was resentful, though it might only have been with a resentment of her presence as a servant to us all. Janet could take no objection from the way they were together. Sometimes I caught something in Zayda—when she was serving him at the table, bending to hold the bowl firmly, in his want of the second hand to steady it himself. It was from nothing outwardly shown, but only from something inwardly felt, in some region of myself into which love was leading me. Janet could not have this vision, for it did not show itself in any image. It was no more than a radiance from Zayda as she bent behind Dirk, to serve him.

He was, it is true, devoting himself to Little Handy, and in ways he concealed from no one. The child was becoming not only Dirk's missing right hand, but the activity of his left. For his amusement Dirk was learning now to draw with it. Handy had but slow word-sense; but almost any picture struck a shining vision from his eyes, or a little bird-cry of delight, or some sudden running glee. I had tried to amuse him by telling him stories; but my only art was of words, and in this I had still to learn the magic of Zayda with them: her way of using them so that they eliminated themselves in favor of the picture they were describing. I

had this to learn from Zayda! Only she could hold Little Handy long to the mere word. In her, speech was so largely unspoken: it was more a matter of gesture, movement of the eyes, pauses between words or gaps into which they were dropped entirely. Zayda might begin a story in this way: 'Once upon a funny time there was a duck.' The time would create the duck without much more description; for if it were itself a funny time, then must it not be a funny duck that lived in it? One would expect him to be almost beyond recognition as a duck at the outset. And so he turned out to be! One feature or another might belie him—as bill, quack or waddle; but for the rest he might walk like a kangaroo, and eat like a man.

It was such a duck that started Dirk off drawing pictures for the child. One night in the kitchen where Little Handy was having his earlier supper, Zayda bemused him into eating, by such a story. Dirk and I happened in, hung back, listened. Zayda herself did not see us until Little Handy called to Dirk: Draw him, Mister Dirk, draw him for me to see! It was then—with his left hand, free of all constraint, unlimited by any duck as he was in any limited present reality—that Dirk struck a new kind of imagination for him. It was one of fantasy, that bears a kind of reality of its own—a probability, let us say—of a duck's manifold being. He drew his voice, and his waddle, and the sudden flight of his wing. . . . He drew Zayda's words and their silences! Mister Duck became a creature of many separate, wonderful animated parts that covered half a dozen sheets of paper. Afterward—whatever Little Handy could not understand of what was said to him, he would demand of Dirk: Draw it for me to see! Send him on an errand, he must have a picture for what he was to get. The fantasies grew until they fluttered from books, were found stuffed in

the corners of chairs, were served up even for dinner. Let the bad weather continue, Dirk would populate a whole new world of creatures with his pictures!

I noticed this now in Zayda's stories (I listened to learn the art from her!): they were all of a coming-to-be, they were of nothing finally created and finished. About this strange duck: she would tell how he grew to be so strange: how he got four feet instead of two, though the extra ones were not good for much but springing, like a kangaroo; how he grew out of all boundaries of duck-size; and how he came at last to sit down at a table like a man and eat cranberry sauce from a spoon. It was a nonsense of becoming; yet it had in it the dynamics of reality—a start in the small and familiar, an end in the thing grown huge beyond any but supernatural recognition. We who were grown, who stood in doorways listening: who were bound to creation as the child was not yet: we knew release from things as they appeared only to be, in this magic of infinite becoming. We who were grown could feel again—growing; who stood in doorways could pass through them.

* * *

Father and I separately had decided to go. I met him at the Goddard gate. He had been out on Hilda, he came in from another direction.

Oh! he said, I thought—some tools—even if next year I wouldn't need them.

And I answered: Just enough canned goods for the winter.

The day had come fitful with sudden winds bringing rain that froze as it fell, glazing the ground over. Under the thin ice those tracks to the house could be seen still; they were so much time frozen: March, the first day we had walked

them. No more had been added: the Widow had been living in complete self-isolation since her first sale.

We shrank from going right on up to the house as before; but now were drawn into it by a ring of people tightening against the cold wind to all the doors. Inside I had no sense of the house itself, but only of this human invasion of which I was a part: I was aware of the size of the rooms only in terms of a large crowd or small.

The canned goods were to be put up first, as an inducement for buyers to come early. Already the table of its display was hiving with women, their voices buzzing and droning, a look of tasting on their faces. Their eyes were as mouths biting at the fruit through the glass jars. I left Father to make a woman's way to the table, breasting it, knowing the softness of the woman-body as I had known the hard sparseness of man's on the day the stock was sold: knowing bulk now in place of bone. There is a closeness in a small crowd of women that no number of men can make. I had been able to slip through the men to the front line; here I could go no farther than the third thickness of woman; and they made a mass before me sealed of all crevices. It was not only because of a physical density of flesh, but one of mind as well. I gave up trying to get closer, thinking that if I bid on the stuff it would have to be blindly, taking the desirability from the bidding itself.

Impaled where I was, I stayed until the sale shortly began—the fruit put up first as it was promised. But I gained, by waiting, a long shielded sight of the Widow Goddard. She appeared just before the auctioneer: the crowd fell away to her slow coming to the table. I could feel reverence forming as a soft mist in the room, rising from the otherwise solid being of the women. Silent to the sight of the fruit, they were solemn to the Widow's coming. Where they might have

stood chattering before the sale of anything else, even that of her marriage bed, they were wordless before this one part of her that they knew in themselves. Perhaps one mother would feel for another in this same way—at the funeral of a child: this mixture of sorrow and of satisfaction. She is giving hers up, but I've still got mine! But it seemed likely that this feeling of the fruit was purer than that for a child could be, for it was more impersonal; less of themselves was in it, it was more of the fruit itself. I knew it by sharing it in a small measure one day I had lived in the summer, helping Zayda put up beans. I knew—the hot of the whole day's striking in the early July morning when I went to pick the beans; and all the heat that followed, the sweat and the steam, the hot-mist on the jars, the burning metal of the lids, the vaporous margin about the boiler and the clouds above it when Zayda lifted the lid. And all the while, outside, coming in, the heat of July rising to its zenith at noon and then surpassing it at the hour of four—when, our clothes wet-packed to our skins, Zayda and I took out the jars, with all the heat of the whole day and its cooking stored in them, from that of the sun on the bean in the garden to the last bubble of the boiling water.

For a moment all was the fruit for me too; but then as I saw her . . .

She walked slowly as to a grave. She was not in black or in good clothes, but in those of her housework, covered over with an old sweater, brown and a man's, too big for her, ragged at the sleeves and buttoned up wrong, one side shorter. Her skirt beneath it hung short to a brown petticoat made of a former dress; and below it I saw that she wore two colors of brown stockings. Yet this woman—clad in this drab way and with a look of poverty—bore some irreproachable look, a stature of independence carried higher by pride

in it, unbent to all opinion and unbroken. Though eyes attacked sweater, petticoat, stockings, they glanced away as if they had struck some hard, lifeless resistance. I looked, and looked away with the crowd; but then looked back as myself and saw—beauty that had died in the bud, the face fresh still but pinched together; the hair an unfaded brown, lustrous, but thinning while yet at the height of its color; the eyes overly bright under gathered lids, and in the dull shadowy setting of their sinking hollows. Yet beauty—in the haunt of it about a flower borne high and slender on its stalk, unopened but unbent toward falling, and unfaded in time. Though she was in her late seventies she bore a look of youth unlived.

There was a mystery of reserve about her as she stood there, so far absent from the inquisition of eyes upon her as to be touched at no point by it: there was some unassailable secrecy. . . . The mood fell upon the crowd as silence: even upon the auctioneer, for one unprofessional moment in his life, it fell, so that he could not find words at once to begin the sale of the fruit. Shortly they returned, as they would up to and through the silence of death itself; yet for that one moment of dry throat and failing word he was subject to the inner impression.

— Ladies and gentlemen!

So he recovered himself, paused to use the impression he had just had, dramatically, then: Today I have a task before me unequaled in my career. Many is the home I have sold out entirely. I have traded in heartaches and hopes, selling out that which was as dear as life itself, and that which was a burden to the owner. I have sold priceless things for nothing and things worth nothing for a lot, good things and bad, new things and old, things close to the heart as the last pound of flesh. But never, never, never at any

time have I had to sell such treasures of the heart and mind, objects of such care and toil as these things of our esteemed neighbor, the late Ben Goddard, and of his widow—things which, however, unlike most treasures of the heart, have as much value to another as to their owners. I feel indeed like Shylock trading in so much flesh, especially, ladies and gentlemen—no, just ladies, just the ladies—especially in offering this array of choice canned goods, the finest to be had anywhere, prize winners all of them, all personally canned by the Widow Goddard herself, standing here before us to approve and attest all I say, and to tell you herself if there is anyone here who does not know it, her records at the Fairs. But, better than what either could say, I will let the fruit speak for itself!

He held up a jar of peaches, coming orange through a dusk of green in the glass, rounded and whole, packed into the jar with such care as an artist would take with a composition of objects or words—so that the jar was full but there was no crushing.

— Observe, ladies, the whole peach. The Widow Goddard has within her possession a method and an implement of extracting the seed in a way hardly noticeable, and then of putting into the hole— But I will not tell you the secret, ladies, I will let a little of the cat within the bag. But I can assure you, you will have the surprise and the . . .

Here he paused for a moment to search for a word, a very special one, tried out, perhaps, for the first time. Then:

— Gustatory, gust-a-tory, delight of your life in store for you. These are no ordinary canned peaches, they are spiced and stuffed and flavored . . . What am I bid on a dozen jars, for a quart, for a quart . . . Gentlemen, you get in on this too. What do you bid on some brandied, as good as wine but not as wicked . . .

He was off: the bid started at fifteen; it rose on the wave of wonder, How *did* she get the stones out?

As the bid hovered around twenty, the Widow Goddard said something to the auctioneer in a low voice. He shouted, in reply:

— Ladies and gentlemen, *ladies*, I have something to add to the offer. With the first dozen jars sold the recipe will be included! Think of it, ladies! The magic secret given away free, with the first dozen jars! It is a chance of a lifetime, to learn in each de-tail the most famous recipe for canned fruit in the state—not only the county, but the state, for the peaches have taken first prize at State Fairs, too . . .

At once the price leaped to twenty-five. Now hair lay wet on the foreheads of the women bidders, in the body-warmth of the room. It was madness for them, with fruit aplenty in their own closets, to buy more, and at such a price. And yet! to get that recipe, to get that recipe! To show such peaches of their own at the Fair next year . . .

The Widow Goddard stood quiet to the bidding; in her eyes was a vision of memory. These women who thought of the Fair: this was not their thinking but hers, it was her memory. Her eyes filled up with it as she stood there. I began to live a certain scene—as if in her—drawn there by the all-compelling thought in her mind. The time at hand fell away, for me, into one past. . . .

* * *

It is a warm day in August; she is preparing to go to the Fair. She descends to the cool of the basement where she keeps the fruit, feeling her way in the darkness to the shelves where, recessed even from the dim light of the forepart of them, she has pushed the fruit. Slowly, one jar at a time held by both hands, she takes them down, feeling the

cold of the glass gratefully, taking knowledge from it that they have kept well, this is the coolness of preservation. She bends to put the jars into a basket divided with partitions of paper. She has no need to select what she takes, all are uniformly good. Then up she comes, out of the floor-door of the cellar, into the August heat of the day and the house, the air spreading over her body like a hot shower. With instinct she defends the basket, hovering it with her hands until she can find a dark piece of paper to put over it. Outside, Ben is waiting, for not until the very last minute has she gone down to get the fruit. She knows he is waiting; she hurries because of the fruit too; but then—standing—who is Ben? what is this in my hand? what is this I have preserved, kept in a dark cellar, covered and cold? It is my life, merciful God, it is my life! It is all there is, I have preserved it well, but this is all, these few jars . . . I will show them—people will say: She preserves, as she is preserved.

But this is madness! It must be the heat—the cool and the heat. Ben is waiting, the Fair will be nice, the fruit does look well, people will say if it does not get the blue ribbon, it should have . . .

Yes, I'm coming, Ben, coming. And she runs from the room, leaving the floor-door of the cellar carelessly open, though for years she has taken care lest some day she leave it open and walk blindly, as she so often walks, into the hole of it.

Outside, Ben is waiting in the rig in his best suit. She too is dressed up, in taffeta, blue, with a collar made of some scrap of fine lawn edged with tatting. No one wears taffeta any more, it is true: crêpe first, and after that rayon, have long since displaced it; none the less it is a fine piece of goods, it is stiff with her independence, it has the rustle of her pride in it, and it fills out her spare form. People say

she starves herself to keep herself, but this is not the only reason; she does not want anything, she has no hunger of any kind . . .

Ben says when she gets in: You look young as ever you were. He keeps saying this; there is little else, it seems, that he has to say. Usually, she likes to hear it; it makes her think down the Road to Old Hayes, living or dead: Young, do you hear? As you found me, young still though you are old unto death! But not today; today young only means preserved. Better say old, Ben. What is there to be young for?

* * *

I was startled, as if from a dream by: I am bid twenty-seven and seven and seven, have I thirty, who'll say thirty, thirty I have—have I thirty?

Only in time, before the fruit went at twenty-seven, I raised my hand, and bought the first dozen lot in at thirty a jar.

Zayda would say with the women around me: High, high! But it is her life that is preserved with the peaches, not one summer but the One Summer. No, I think, it is cheap at the price. I am sorry to have bought it from you so cheap!

I bought the rest of the fruit and the preserves: the ginger watermelon pickle, the tutti-frutti preserves, the Paradise Jelly made of apples, quinces and cranberries . . . After the peaches she looked to me, as if asking me to buy them. I could see: though she was still bearing herself with the same pride before the crowd, something had begun to break within her, to that realization: Preserved, preserved! Take them, you take them, you who are living at Hayes El House (for she must know this by now, a full intelligence of me

was in her eyes), you who are living there as I might have been. Put them in his cellar, say: Old Hayes, I have brought her fruit home, fruit of the second wife you sought. All comes to you in the end. Who are you that this should be so, *who* are you, who *are* you!

Frightened at a sudden wild look of wonder in her eyes, I bought in the first lot of vegetables too, the corn preserved in whole kernels of midsummer gold, and the peas of its first and its last green . . . Too much again, I paid; but now her eyes were beseeching: You take them, take them home! So I bought them.

* * *

Now it was the furniture. The crowd gathered to the door of her bedroom, where the furniture stood still in place, scarf on dresser, and the toilet things, and in the mirror her image looking back where inside the room she stood, as if mercilessly to expose herself . . . For a moment they hesitated, as if with some deep but indefinite feeling of her there; but then they pressed on, after the auctioneer.

— Now, ladies and gentlemen, now I . . .

Silence of implication, blush of thought, but then the plunge:

— The Goddards' own bedroom set. What am I bid for it, the whole set? See the bed, ladies and gentlemen, the mattress almost new, or very slightly used; observe the springs how they spring. Here is a stout gentleman. Try it, sir, does it give, I ask you, does it give?

A voice cried a bid into his insinuation: Fifty.

— Good, I have fifty to start, a starter at fifty, who'll give fifty-five?

I turned and incredibly saw—it was Father! Neither could he bear it for her. He was flushed, he looked almost

angry. But what if he should get it? He should not, he did not have the money!

But the fat man was sitting on the edge of the bed. The auctioneer was off again, there was no stopping him. Now he pulled down the covers that were to be included—the spread, the blankets, the sheets . . . He was uncovering . . .

* * *

Waking in the nights, years ago, the first of her wedding nights . . .

Where am I? Who is this man beside me? I dare not look, lest it be, lest it not be! Oh, but it is not! I feel nothing, I have died to this thing called love that should have enlivened me. How might it have been if—? I know the difference, it is the one between life and death. But why should this be so? What life has he, what power of life that another, that Ben has not? Oh, but I have myself chosen this death to that life. He frightened me! . . . Not with his passion—no, I could better have borne that than Ben's want of it—but with the thing he sought not in me but through me. If only it might have been the Land, as everyone said! But I could feel something beyond that, endless and nameless and unknown even to him. To this I could not give myself, I could not!

So I here, and this man beside me!

* * *

— Seventy I am bid, seventy and seventy, and five and five . . . *Sold*, to the Colonel here, at seventy-five the set.

I hunted up Father: Why on earth did you buy that?

It is such a nice old set of furniture, Father said.

But I forced the truth from him sternly.

— Well, at first, Jay, I bid because that fellow made me

nervous for her. Did you notice how she looked? Then I began to think we hadn't anything to begin with, after we leave Hayes El . . .

It will be too big for a city apartment, I reminded him dryly. (It was a nine-foot-high poster with half-canopy.)

He sighed: I wish I had the money to buy this place in . . .

But as he spoke the voice of the auctioneer from the hall reached us.

— *But now, ladies and gentlemen, I will keep you waiting no longer for the thing that has brought you here, the sale of the house and the land . . .*

We started to follow his voice. But then I looked back . . . The Widow was standing in the room still, at the foot of the bed. A strange sudden half-smile was upon her lips. Was she thinking that we would be living on at Hayes El, and taking the furniture there?

* * *

The bidding began outside, the auctioneer trying to lure the crowd there to point out the barn and the outbuildings, the construction of the house, foundation of stone and basement under the whole of it. He was so far heated to the sale that he did not feel the wind and the mist blowing; but the crowd held back in the house, clustered to the different doorways that led onto the porch; and when he finished his introduction he too came inside, and the bidding went on.

But it was hardly a bidding, and it hardly went on! He had fairly to extract a second bid of thirty-five an acre, when it should have stood near a hundred. Anxiety began to spread visibly on the faces of the Widow's neighbors, not only for her, more largely for the Land itself. For with this so far undervalued, what of all else built upon it? Must not

the very structure of life fall to the cheapening of the foundation? Several men spoke in this way. One said: If only she hadn't put it up in November; land has a way at this time of looking so barren. It is not fair to the Land, if she didn't think of herself, she should have thought of it.

But another answered: It isn't the weather: any man of the Land could foresee the spring to come. No, it is fear holding folks back, that someone is here bidding for a Hayes.

At the name I wondered: But Brent? What would he want with it, having more now than he could manage?

I listened closely, bent my head and hid to listen. Now the second man said: Folks don't forget how it was with Old Hayes. Come a sale, he would get the land he wanted at any price; no use to bid against him; should you try he just might make you take it at twice what you aimed to pay, and afterward get it from you at his own price. Folks don't forget. It's a strange man who is bidding, he looks like an agent. Likely enough it is Brent Hayes, or maybe his cousin Kirtley.

At that name I began to listen openly! Now the first one objected:

— But Kirtley Hayes don't live hereabouts. What does he want with more here? He don't use what he has, just keeps a colored woman and one white family on all five hundred. And besides, I hear he married land and money in England—several thousand acres, I hear, though I don't believe that, hardly. Still and all, what would he want with a few hundred acres more?

I caught every word, I all but leaned on the man speaking, to hear it. But now Father came, seeking me, wedging and threading his way. He was again flushed to purchase!

— Jay, at this price, surely we ought to be able?

— No, Father, you really can't; even at this price you can't! Figure it up: there's almost four hundred acres!

— But, Jay, I ought to run it up a little for her at least. This is terrible; it is her whole life, all she has held on to as life itself.

— Yes, but, Father, figure it out, and remember Janet!

I had to dissuade him, as much as I would have liked, here, in the same country, with Hayes El in sight . . . And what if he only came once a year? I would have that once a year . . .

The bid crawled to forty, the man who looked like an agent raising it by five dollars the acre. Even so, forty times three hundred and ninety—and he had no more than a few hundred to start with, and no stock but the sheep, and no tools, and one set of furniture for the fourteen rooms . . . And Janet!

I just groaned: But remember Janet, if nothing else.

The bid stood at forty. The auctioneer bellowed:

— But, ladies and gentlemen, let us quit this joking. Forty an acre for land in this section, and Goddard land, every acre cared for as a child? I'll take forty as a starter, but let us get started! I have forty and forty and forty, who'll say fifty . . .

But no one said fifty, or even forty-five: the bid stood, it stood visibly! The auctioneer plied and prodded: But, gentlemen, here is a fourteen-room house, a barn for sixteen head, three hundred and ninety acres of land, in Kentucky, Kentucky blue-grass, half of it!

Father moaned: Couldn't I make it, raising horses with Hilda for a start?

I reminded him: Kirtley Hayes is buying Hilda from Prue for a thousand.

He lamented: You're as bad as Dirk today. Where is your imagination?

Fettered, I said. It's got to be. Do you think I don't want to, myself?

— Couldn't we count on your writing a book or something?

— Not that definitely, my dear Father, to say the least. But, anyway, you can't bid against a Hayes . . .

Father started to the name; he had not heard what I . . . All he could make of it was: It must be Brent. He gave up then, dug his hands in his pockets and walked away.

As if the auctioneer had been holding the bid in hope of him, he broke the drill of his 'I have forty and forty' suddenly, shouting:

— Gentlemen, I am selling it. One more chance, have I forty-five? Just five more will get it, five more on the acre . . .

But Father kept on walking away, jaw set, hands imprisoned in his pockets against the assenting gesture.

Then the words came: Sold—at forty the acre to—that gentleman there. Will your step up, sir?

And after another moment, while a man small, and indeed with the look of an agent, came up to the desk and the crowd stood silent and singly attentive to the name: Sold—to Kirtley Hayes.

* * *

I could see from where I kept on standing, the 'Widow Goddard in the kitchen across the hall. As the crowd broke up slowly, more and more clearly I was able to see her. Many voices spoke as one now: Even Old Hayes wouldn't do that, he would start fair, he would never depreciate the land that far. He'd be content with making ten or so on an

acre. He craved all the land he could get, but he wouldn't lower its value getting it.

Out of these words more grew, about Old Hayes: He'd marry a woman or betray her to get land, but he wouldn't do anything to hurt the land itself. He wouldn't have done this to the Widow's land— Why, years ago when he tried to marry her for it, he offered her seventy-five with himself or a hundred and fifty without. He'd turn in his grave to think . . .

But then someone remembered that he did not have a grave. Well, wherever he was, he'd turn! (But Old Hayes, where are you, where are you? As your body burned, as the ash fluttered in the wind and fell, where?—you—willing this, saying dead as you said living: This is my will, to give myself body and soul to the earth. Where are you now, to will or not to will this?)

Out of the crowd's silence of wondering 'where?' another man spoke with one certainty at least: No, he would not have wanted Kirtley Hayes to buy it so cheap. No, this isn't his doing, it is not a revenge he would take. This is just a rich man trying to get richer on the land itself, it isn't Old Hayes.

* * *

Now across the room emptied and still of all thought, even my own, I saw her standing at the window in the kitchen looking out of it, over the land, not at this, but over—again with that vivid staring in her eyes from which I could read almost in so many words written:

— So it becomes part of Hayes El, acre to acre adjoining! You and I—you said once to me: same as our land. But I could not bear to feel that I was only the earth to you, the woman-body of the earth that was wife as well as

mother to you. I could not bear that then! But now when you are dead and when soon I shall be, I do not mind. I find myself as my fields, lying barren to yours that are teeming with life. Now let the fences be taken down, the hedges uprooted; let the wind blow, bearing seed from your grasses; let your cattle cross the line: it is all one life and one body bearing life. Let me be as my earth! I am far beyond being woman in myself now. And it is good to be more! Why did I fear that promise you held forth, the deep and widespread glory of being that was like the scattering of seeds over the earth, and the stars in the sky? 'Be as the earth,' you seemed to say to me. That was your challenge. 'Give your being as I give mine, withhold nothing, give your soul to its body, ensoul the earth, ensoul it!' Well, now I give it: it is late, but I have come to it. At any price, through any channel—take it, I am giving it to you!

She made a gesture of giving with her hands; her eyes shone, and her lips smiled. I could not but read this thought from how she looked, standing there—glorified by her loss!

* * *

But now her hands were fallen, as if their lifting thought had passed from her. I felt her sudden whelming fullness drain from her, as if, bodily enfeebled, she sought a chair and sat down, back to the window now, to its gray picture of Time, of November, the time of her life she had come to. She looked so very tired. In another moment, I thought, she will either sleep or die. With alarm taken at the thought, I moved toward her—but stopped; for I was held—by something happening in the moment to her. Something like death, for I seemed to die! I felt a dizzy spinning, a being borne as if on air, a slow upright falling. It was all like a quick flight: as if a storm were taking me up and then returning me, pre-

cisely where I was, in the same position. Breathless, as if from movement, though all this was while I had been standing still, my voice came of itself from me, calling in alarm: Mrs. Goddard! And then, pulling from my faintness, I ran to her.

She was not dead, she opened eyes slowly to my coming. She was immediately sensible, she said: Oh, I must have dozed off.

And she smiled and she said: You got the fruit, didn't you?

Her face and voice had one softness in them. She was sitting there softly now, somewhat oddly, in a kind of reduced way within the form of her too-big clothes.

Yes, I breathed, still with wonder and fear though she seemed all right, even happy: Yes, and we should have liked the land and the house. I wish we might have raised that bid for you.

Oh, that's all right, she kept on smiling: It doesn't matter about the price. You needn't feel sorry, folks needn't . . .

It was odd, the way she was smiling, brightly but somehow vaguely, as if she had been sleeping and had had a dream from which she was not quite awake. There was something secret still about her, but secret now of happiness.

It is my turn to be sorry, she said still more brightly. You paid too much for the peaches, I'm afraid. After all they were only preserved peaches, Fair or no Fair. I used to set store by such things, but now . . .

She laughed a little and made a move to get up. But she could not!

My foot's asleep, she said. It must be asleep.

And she bent to rub her leg. Then slowly she looked up; she was flushed from bending but at the same time turning

pale from the color. And her eyes began to grow dim from dream to awakening.

— I'm afraid I . . .

Then together we understood. I knelt in front of her to feel her leg. Our eyes met closely. It was a knowledge we had together. I ran to get help for her, given courage and strength by the way she took it when she realized.

Even so, she murmured as she gave up trying to move her leg: Even so, it doesn't matter.

* * *

We were late starting home, we would be late for dinner. Father had helped with her, to get her up to her room and in bed.

We'll leave the furniture, he said, for as long as you need it. And I know Kirtley Hayes will let you stay on here, as long as you wish.

She said, with a surprised memory of herself: I thought I couldn't stay the winter, but now I'll be glad to. Yes, I think he will let me stay on when he hears, especially when I tell him that I am glad he got it, it should have belonged to Hayes El in the first place.

When we were ready to leave—when we had found a neighbor who would get her supper and stay the night with her—Father appeared with—a white horse! A very old white horse, with a long and low outreaching neck, as if through years and years he had pulled and pulled, and was still pulling though he had no burden now to draw.

They kept him for going to the Fairs, in their rig, he explained. Of course he is good for nothing more, but he was going at ten; I just had to run up the bid a little, and then I got him.

Better ride him home, he suggested, since you haven't got

clothes on to ride Hilda, and it is almost dark. You can sit sideways or backward, and you won't need a saddle: one is hollowed out of his bones, poor thing.

So I got on the white horse, with halter on him but no bridle, and only this saddle of bones, of which Father had spoken. And, almost in night wholly come, we started homeward, Father holding Hilda in beside me, to the white horse's lumbering walk, but yet not talking until we reached the lane and had turned in. Then suddenly:

— Jay! Why do you think he—?

I went over, aloud, all those reasons that had been stifled of thought within me.

— Revenge? But it can't be. Nor greed. And in any case, as it worked out, it had an opposite effect. Even counting the stroke she had, one could not see her before the sale and after it, and not realize it as a blessing, no matter what the cost to her. It set her free!

Yes, Father breathed, it set her free. I've been thinking of that, and I think—we must take what happened to her like—well, like Drake Parker's accident.

His words brought a shock of related understanding.

— Then you do think it might be the work of a will that still lives?

Father came to his answer as if he were growing into its wisdom and its strength as he gave it:

— Yes, but not to the end it sought in life. I don't believe it is the way most people think, the way it appears: the truth runs opposite to appearances, I believe, more often than not. Here it isn't to break their will but to strengthen it. No matter how much Old Hayes wanted to overcome and possess in his life, I think—if it is his will that lives to work on the life in this place—it is to strengthen and set free. Drake Parker stands for this. We must take Drake as the

picture of all else that happens: his life is the inner picture.

Of what must happen to us too? I almost whispered my own growing realization.

Well, Father said with sudden brusqueness, we have come here, haven't we? Our destiny has brought us.

And then, either because he could no longer hold Hilda in, or because he had said all he could of the whole year's happening, he rode on ahead, leaving me . . .

. . . now alone on the lane, on the white horse, strange figure of fantasy. Again projected, I saw myself coming—riding white in the gathering dusk of the whole year to this November evening. Shadow of the year lying before me on the road; on both sides a rigid gloom of trees, black trunk and branch with no haunt of leaf or any memory of March movement in them; below, no responding sound but the echo of a heavy-footed horse, dull and weary; and in the air no voice but that of Father saying: I think we must take Drake as an inner picture . . . yes, Drake stands . . . we have come, haven't we? Our destiny has brought us . . .

From these words 'we have come' I knew that I could not conclude that we would stay. No, not from the rest said and pictured: not from Drake Parker standing, or the Widow . . . These two images rose out of Father's words for my witness: sight out of sound as the sound died away into the silence of mist and shadow closing in upon it. The picture was rather—of loss, of sacrifice, of a giving up to find. Truth, opposite to appearances! I might better conclude from his words 'we have come' that—we must go. And it even might be, before Christmas. I must stand here and look at myself, as Drake looked at all that land when he said: No, I will not take it! And as the Widow—hearing the word Sold—smiled and knew freedom in giving up, even

so I!—here on this lane—ride it now, willing for this to be the last time.

It was good that the old horse came so slowly; it gave me time to get some bearing in myself toward this future stand that I might have to make. The gathering night of the year was good too, and the chill of winter for this same end: to make me command that inner possession from time and place and person: that flame of living thought the year had enkindled, that heart of living warmth. Hand to my heart—in the image standing and the image riding—I strove to hold it captured . . . Oh, blessed light, oh, beloved warmth! Brighter than that day in March, the Road lay for a moment, though it was night and November. These were but as shadows lying before me that I could myself disperse, bringing this inner light to them . . .

For a moment. With fullness it was shortly over. Still something of it lay protracted through all that followed, no matter how heavily shadowed, as . . .

. . . I took the old horse to the barn and stabled him, out of all fantasy now, just bones and their hollows, sorry creature of the Widow's *past* life, of those years lying long and dark to that one moment of her late vision . . .

. . . and as Janet at dinner wept and scolded: I can't bear it. I tell you I can't bear it even until Christmas . . .

. . . and as I went up early and cold to bed and lay there upon the very breast of night and winter, against the hill so closely outside my window: that breast of earth that was like one of a mother dead (I, who had been born to a dead mother, who bore such memory in me!) . . .

Yes! Though the day ended so for me, without hope of Christmas, denying myself this, I went—heart-warm and mind-bright, on a ray of that Road—to sleep.

DECEMBER

Fire on the Snow

'Day the first snow falls,' Zayda had said, quoting the world-wide legend, 'that is the number of them that will follow.' When, on the first day it fell, and afterward steadily into the next week—and still snowing—Zayda laughed: Well, it is the same snow, isn't it?—it is one continuous. And each morning as she would sweep the walk from the kitchen she would say: I'm down to yesterday, anyway.

It is uncommon in Kentucky, she said: Christmas comes green more often than white in Kentucky. Almost the legend has to be changed for Kentucky children, even the smallest of them putting the question of the grass and the clean roofs: How can he come in a sleigh and with reindeers?

Not Handy though, she added, he hasn't brought his sleighs to earth in any case, either to grass or snow. Air still has substance to him for all traveling.

And while the snow fell and fell, she told of other Christmases when violets bloomed in the church valley, and all the fields of wheat and rye lay uncovered with the look of a spring meadow about them. She talked green against the white, perhaps to cheer Janet; or it may have been just in those contrasts that lived for her, from which she drew the vividness of all her thinking, and its peculiar wholeness. For

her as for Drake, Time was all in one piece in her mind: it had but an inward and outward turn to its movement, it did not pass. Spring beat at the heart of winter; the white waste of field to sky for her was but as breast bare of its inner beating. She went about now enlivened, as if in a time more greatly alive for her. Even Janet felt her in this way, and sought the warmth of her kitchen and what she called the 'company of a servant.' (To be driven to this!)

With the wind and its snow from the west, we went burrowing into the eastern end of the house, even into the two rooms over the kitchen that might be called servants' quarters. Janet walked the long halls, trailing the covers from her bed, and complained: To be driven to servants' quarters! Yet she went, to the scent of heat; settling at last in the room just over the main kitchen where, primitively indeed, heat from the stove below was piped through the floor, in addition to the radiation from the furnace, and a fireplace besides. So, as she said, she was 'steeped in the steam and the sweat' of the kitchen, night and day. It was no mere alliteration! Sound of the letter *s* and its form was in the atmosphere. Zayda kept one thing or another boiling or baking all day; and Father and Dirk, in from working in the snow, provided the wet clothing and skin that dried visibly and odorously. Janet resented their intimacy with Zayda: the way they would remove boots, sit in woolen socks to dry them until Zayda brought slippers . . . Or come unshaven after hot water, or even once or twice shave in the kitchen. She kept resenting but stayed here herself, sniffing, with a look almost of bliss, as if there were a scent of life here, for the world that lay dead outside for her.

Within the first week we were snowed in to the sills of the windows, and we had to chisel doorways through drifts that the wind made each night. I moved from my room, not

only because of the cold, but to prepare it for him, should he come. We had no word (but that word 'Until') and Father sighed and said in an undertone to me: Perhaps he will not be free to come after all. And in the nights a kind of aching came toward me, in those words resounding: Not free, not free! As if spoken by him, this a message sent to me, through Father. Yet I cleared the room of all vestige of my being there; and Father cut stacks of wood for the fire-place; and we laid it with the best logs; and—as the second week ended—Father brought kindling as if he had a little more hope.

— Zayda says he comes unexpected; she says he hires a car from the nearest place he can reach by train, and invariably surprises them. He likes to come this way, she says; he likes to be received by surprise.

Father had found me in the room, putting pine branches in vases on the mantel. Now I kept my face to this, dodging the mirror, arranging the pine. Father studied my evasion, I felt him doing this.

— But don't count on this, Jay. You mustn't let yourself count on anything.

This was the first reference he had made directly to what I had been feeling in him, so helpless and anxious. And he came and stood behind me and for a moment gave me a little protective embrace, sudden and warm with all his understanding and its sorrow. I kept head bent, fingers busy with the pine; but truly out of myself I was able to answer:

— I am not counting, Father, not on anyone but myself.

Then it is all right, he said. There is—there can be—no other dependence.

And then he said words more profound and wonderful of understanding, and more sorrowful. for me: Life is longer

yielding the prize than death, Jay. And freedom is nothing that can be given any of us. No one is free of anyone or anything until he is free of himself.

Then his hands dropped, and he moved away. I knew he was speaking to me as he had spoken on the lane, in November.

* * *

When they had cut wood enough we went on laying fires on all the hearths. There were many, one in almost every room. We meant to warm it all somehow for Christmas. Zayda began to drive us from the kitchen; for Cleony was coming down for Christmas, hitch or no hitch, on the chance that Mister Kirtley . . . And with Cleony here, garmented against the cold and her rheumatism, and with the spread also of the Christmas cooking, there was no room for us. Zayda said the house could be heated if we built fires enough. With wood stacked to cover half of the big back porch, we began in the third week of the snow to lay them even in the west wing. Still we did not light the festive match to all at once. In all our minds now there was a sort of expectancy, rising out of the time itself. It was nameless: rather, a pure sense of 'When the time comes,' instead of 'When he comes.' Even for me it was this way, the time extending itself to—just Christmas, night before, that time of light and fire, that glowing time of the candle lighted, the hearth warm, and the head lifted to listen—visitation expected—whosoever outwardly it might be, he who comes, comes as Another on this night, Another who is nameless though we name Him—nameless in our wonder and our awe of the divine-human mystery that will not die in any of our misunderstandings but returns each year at this time, seek-

ing over and over its expression in—light and fire and expectancy. Candlelight and fire-warmth and the head lifted to listen!

* * *

It was Sunday of the third week, and the afternoon. Janet was taking a nap, back in the west wing where she had moved since the wind had shifted to the east. Father and Dirk were in the forest looking for a Christmas tree. Zayda was up with Cleony preparing to move her down to the house before the snow got deeper. I was alone in the house save for Janet, sleeping.

Because it was Sunday I had dressed in the best woolen I had, a turquoise-green with a scarlet zipper. Dirk called it classic for a Greek mold of its fabric to breast and arm: he granted me a certain merit of form—borrowed from the dress—when I wore it. I speak of the dress because I saw myself in it as if from outside: saw the form of which Dirk had spoken, and the color in its accurate becomingness to the somewhat odd blue-green of my eyes and the very red lips that were a feature Dirk and I shared. The rightness of the dress set me free from it, somehow. Perhaps this was because I was released from the fixing and the fussing that a woman makes to bind herself to her appearance when there is not such perfect harmony or expression felt. In any case—free from all attention to myself I ran about the house, adding more pine boughs and some holly Zayda had brought, to the mantels; changing chairs and tables, opening books, adjusting lamps—all to break the house down into postures of livingness wherever one might look. It had become as a kind of plastic clay in my hands, which I sought to mold into all the forms of homelikeness, of coming home, of being home, of the heart's most inward homing.

At four I found myself lighting candles in the front living room, drawing a chair (to a fire not kindled yet) with a cushion right for the head; and a table beside it, and a book open, one I was myself in the midst of reading. I was fairly running now, in a flutter of activity. Oh, the rooms, the rooms, there were so many of them! I was not done yet. Here a pillow, there a book. If only I had flowers, red ones for the green pine, red for the green, red for the green!

When I went to the front window to draw Janet's draperies, to give the room an enclosed inward look, I saw—up the pike, slowly, slowly coming against the snow—a car, all snow-covered, windshield too, save the little fan of clear glass described by the wiper. I stood and watched it come, but not with any expectancy: it was just good to see something on the road, to feel movement through time that the snow had been arresting. Even when the car turned into the lane, I barred expectancy so far in myself that I just thought: Someone is lost and is asking the way. Yet I ran to the door, eager and glad to speak to someone, to give some expression of how eager and glad and hearty I was feeling . . .

I had to tug against the wind to open the door as the knocker fell. It made me breathless to what—further to take my breath—I saw . . . There before me—hat off, but coat collar raised high—coat shouldered white with snow—a big coat, very dark to white snow and white face and hair blond and thin . . .

— May I come in and bring my bags?

I was stupid with—if not surprise—incredible joy.

— But I thought—you were someone lost.

— Perhaps I am. But may I bring in my bags?

He turned back to the car while I just stood on, holding the door open. Out came three huge bags, huge and dark like

his coat, there against the snow. He had his hat back on and pulled low against the wind. He bent into the car and gave the driver something, drawing out again with: No, no. Keep it, and a good Christmas to you! Then as the car started to make the turn around the house, he swung the bags up onto the stoop, one by one. . . . Big, they were, and heavy, and very dark against the snow. I just stood holding the door . . .

Then, suddenly, inside—hat off again, crushed under his arm, and both hands extended to me:

— You're surprised?

— Yes, I . . .

— You're just the way I left you on Hilda. Breathless. Do you live this way always? It is the way you write, you know.

— No, but I— You did surprise—though Zayda said you would.

— Yes, I like to. It always strikes something original from both the one I'm surprising and myself.

He took my hands when I failed to offer them, and held them, looking closely . . . Oh, to be strong in his presence as I had begun to be in his absence! This was a strength I had still to develop!

It is good to see you again, he said softly, to confirm your—your gratuitous existence at Hayes El.

I felt his eyes searching, as if for that recognition, that day on Hilda. I longed to look back straightly, but was not clear or strong enough: I was subject to that warm, immediate confusion . . .

I withdrew my hands with effort, and turned back into the hall.

— It is getting so dark. Do take your things off while I light the hanging lamp, and the fire in there. It is ready.

He had begun to remove the great topcoat, shaking the snow from it. I talked on, moving into the living room to light the fire.

— The house isn't comfortable without all fires going.

— No, it is abominably heated. I was right at home in English houses after leaving this one. But wait, let me help you.

He had his coat off and thrown onto a chair. He was emerging from it in a dark suit, admirably cut. I could feel its elegance through everything else, and how well he wore it. I knelt to enkindle the fire, explaining:

— It is all laid. Father and Dirk have wood cut for a week ahead at least. They're out now for a Christmas tree.

And I chattered on, about Janet sleeping, and Zayda up at Cleony's . . .

He was kneeling beside me, taking the matches from my hand, smiling.

— I'm glad you were alone. One surprise at a time is enough to deal with.

I sat back on my heels helplessly, as the flame caught the kindling.

— Oh, I'm sorry to be so very much surprised. I'm afraid you are striking something a bit too original from me.

— No, it is good—good to feel someone breathing and going breathless of life the way you do: living that immediately in things, and at their heart.

— But that is Hayes El. It is Zayda, and the way the land lies, and how the seasons come . . .

The fire had caught. He settled back upon a stool; he looked at me. Now—as I warmed to the fire, as I heard him say, 'It is good'—I took comfort and reassurance enough to look up for a moment. Oh, but a moment in time: it can halt and hold, it can draw into itself all time past and to come,

and hold it involved and included! There was his face, light in the fire's glow, and my own: two faces enlightened, and nothing else: body below fell away in the dusk of the room: only two faces in firelight, the eyes enlightened from within as from without, as by one fire kindling and flaming. More vivid now than that day on the horse, in the sun . . .

His voice came distantly heard through the thing seen, saying again:

— It is good to see you, good to see you again.

And so mine, as it answered: It is good to have you come, after we had given you up.

But the thing heard and said was as nothing to the thing seen. This seeking in his eyes! It is for me, me myself, not Father or Zayda, not Drake even, but me. This time is between us, for this I was alone, this is another moment. Time beginning a future of itself, however distant.

His voice came as if with a struggle against something he too was seeing, against all said and heard.

— I thought I couldn't get away. Christmas, you know, with children.

The moment was over. He got up, bent, offering his hands to help me up. I gave him mine, and he pulled me up. But all was different. He began to walk about the room, as he went on to explain:

— Until the last minute I didn't know. Then Vic hauled the children off to the Riviera; there I have consistently refused to go—I like my seasons as they come in the year; it was nothing unusual to refuse her that.

I went about the room lighting more candles. Now he settled down in a chair I had drawn, and picked up a book. He talked a little more, sketchily; then went silent, reading. I turned once, and saw him look up from what he had read (what I had myself been reading, it was Rilke, his new *Let-*

ters in English). He seemed to be looking at what he had just read, as if this were written in letters of light and of fire, there in the glow into which he sat staring. And I saw the face tired, thin and fine-lined: the hair growing from the forehead as from its thought: the skin pallid, almost ashen to the enlightenment of the eyes. . . . And tenderness for that which was tired and thin, was strained and seeking, all but overwhelmed me; and I thought that I must give it some expression, go to him and bend and lay my hand on brow, or smooth the lines from the eyes . . . Some gesture in the hands escaped me; but he did not see, so intently was he staring into the fire. And I caught it back, and controlled all in my voice, in time.

— You are tired. Don't you want to go up to your room? I'll fix you some tea: you must be used to tea just at this hour.

He looked toward me, not with intensity now, but wanly. And he smiled so.

— Yes, I am tired. It has been quite a jaunt here against some stiff weather on land and sea. Perhaps that is it. And then this relaxation in being here—every year I feel it when I come, but never so much as now. To have the house lived in, life here, thought, books open—this one . . .

He bent to the book, took it up and read aloud:

'Whoever looks seriously at it finds that, as in the case of death, that is difficult, neither has there yet been discovered for difficult love any enlightenment, any solution, any hint of a way, and for these two problems that we carry muffled up and hand on without opening, there will be no general rule based upon common consent to be found out. But in the same measure by which we begin as individuals to try to live, these great things will come nearer to meet the individual in us.'

He stopped, closed the book and got up.

— I will go and wash up, at least. And if you could make tea—?

I went before him to the hall, and led the way upstairs. I took him to the room against the hill.

But see here, he said. You've gone to the trouble to move out of this for me.

I knelt to the fireplace and lighted the fire.

— I was driven by the wind, but anyway I wanted you to have it.

I rose to leave as the fire took. He was standing in the middle of the room, looking a little confused. He said nothing more, and as I moved to the door I knew myself forgotten in a return he was making to a time when I was not . . .

* * *

In less than half an hour he was down, in boots and breeches and the green woolen shirt, with a suede jacket now on top of it. He came swinging into the kitchen where I was struggling with tea things and a tray. It was beautifully warm here with fireplace and coal stove going.

Let's have tea here, he said, taking the tray and the cups to the kitchen table. He had brought a bundle with him.

Flowers, he said. I always bring flowers to the house, Zayda, Cleony, whoever wants them.

He tossed the big rolled bundle to me.

— To you, if you like them.

I opened the bundle: it was tight with big red roses.

Red for my green! I exclaimed, shaking them loose into the dozens of their numbers: I've been wanting red for the pine branches.

He came to the table where I opened them, bent, took out a bud, broke the long stem in half, and offered it to me.

— One for your dress, for the scarlet of it.

I tucked it into the ringed ends of the zipper where it closed the dress at the throat. Bending my cheek, I knew the velvet caress of rose petal. For a moment I lost all detachment: I was within that dress warmly, and a woman, and his eyes were upon me, and his flower there. And I went scarlet, as the rose was. But the moment passed. I was free again, and sitting opposite him at the kitchen table, tea and beaten biscuits between us, a low vase of some of the broken roses, and strawberry jam. All was warm and good and colorful and bright: roses, jam, firelight, scarlet of my dress, and the ruddiness come to his blond skin from his warm shirt and jacket in the room that was growing warmer from fire on the hearth leaping, fire in the stove stirred, and steam from tea . . . I knew all warm and good and colorful and bright; but I *knew* it: I was myself out of the qualities felt, in possession of all, but not possessed by them. As the scene outside the window was free and different from the interior of the room: was white and cool and receding distantly into a blue mystery of shadow: so I, from all sense-enclosure. And I felt him in the same way—free. Even as he talked, saying again, ‘It is good to be here,’ and bent closely and warmly toward me, I felt that our greater being together was not in the body of ourselves and the room—in the color red or the warmth of fire—but in a region outside these as the whole white world in the moment was outside . . . I felt Being in us both meet but not merge in a new region of coming together: of meeting and recognizing: reacting and being reacted upon. All the while he bent, talking—I felt, almost unto seeing it, a part of him withdrawn, standing to the moment, apart from me but drawing me out of myself until largely Life in me extended beyond all limitations of it known before.

We were interrupted by Zayda and Cleony; but, perhaps, in no case could the moment have lasted much longer. Well I knew that for me it was no permanent attainment: I welcomed their coming as a break made from outside instead of within me. I slipped away from his greeting of them, bearing with me the almost insupportable sense of enlargement. In the living room I went to the chair, the lamp, the book . . . Small again, suddenly I fell into it, took up the book; but did not need to read, for the words were indeed written in the fire and the light of the burning wood—love difficult, as death is difficult.

* * *

He had gone out to look for Father and Dirk. The three of them came tramping in only a few moments before dinner, at seven. Janet was dressed in a velvet dinner gown; but they ate as they came. He seemed used to women like Janet: his manner was patient and tired; he said only: If you will excuse us we will eat as we are. She by no means excused them; but they did eat as they were. And they were—exhilarated, the three of them, in a conspiracy of good spirits which they shed upon us, but could not share. They were good bodily spirits, issue of the cold and the forest and their work in it: of hunger and coursing blood and tired muscles meeting hot food and warmth and rest. They were male spirits, coming home to woman cleansed and strengthened from sources outside her; they were physical, but of the world outside the embodiment either of man or of woman. They came from that margin of activity that man has set free in himself as woman has not. One with Janet now, I felt myself a somewhat confined and sorry figure before them. Only a woman like Prue, I thought, could have matched any of them in the moment.

I felt no difference in one from the other: none in him from father or brother: they had one vigor and one attractiveness beyond any personal identity. Dirk was not brother and twin now, or any part of myself: he emerged in the moment into manhood as Man himself. He was released as never before!—with head flung back, eyes dark and brilliant, shoulders straightened against the imbalance from the lost arm; one hand flashing with the activity of two; voice clear and ringing in all that he said as if with tone taken from the whole outside world. Dirk bore even more charm for me than Kirtley, in the change that had taken place in him. How it had come about, I did not question now, but let it rest as a matter of wind and weather: labor of muscle with rest for the mind; challenge, perhaps, in the one who had come; and then just the mood in the time at hand, nearing Christmas. I did not dare believe that it might be for him too—release by love into new regions of being . . .

Kirtley's release seemed to be one into his boyhood. His face became that in the picture for me. And all that he said: We must get some sleighing in; tomorrow I will go to the blacksmith and have new runners made for the sled. We'll need another horse. Let's call Prue and have her bring one.

In the midst of dinner he jumped up to call Prue by phone. I wondered if he had my sudden thought of her, that only she was a match for them in their high spirits. He asked her to come up—he wanted to settle for Hilda—and to bring up some old horse that would pull alongside the white one. She must have said, 'We're all but snowed in down here,' for he answered: Come before it gets any worse, and stay. There is plenty of room.

When he came back to the table he said: It is all right, isn't it, about her staying if she can't get back?

He had my reassurance if not Janet's. I watched Dirk for

objection, but saw none. Dirk, for the time at least, was released also from memory. Prue's coming aroused for him only a nameless expectation.

During dessert the Goddard sale came up. He said:

— I got it, didn't I? I only heard indirectly—nothing from my agent yet.

A certain constraint fell upon Father and me. He felt it, and looked to me for its understanding.

— But what is it? Do you feel that I should not have bought it because of her and Old Hayes?

I shook my head: No. As it happened, she was glad about that.

I had a feeling she would be by now, he said. I was almost sure she had outlived her resistance.

Then you do not know at what price you got it? Father asked.

We had finished dinner, we were getting up. He and Father walked away to his answer; but I heard him say: But I thought my bidding would run it up for her!

I worked on in the dining room, helping Zayda, holding back from their being together. He came in as I was scraping the crumbs.

Have you got some warm things handy? he asked abruptly. I'd like to walk a bit outside and talk to you, about this Goddard business.

He was quite definite, smoking, and biting a little nervously at his pipe. I went for an old coat and hood and galoshes in the cupboard downstairs. When we went out through the hall, past the others in the living room, he called in to them:

— Back in a few moments. I've got some local business to talk over with Julia.

Just outside the door, as he paused to light up his pipe:

— I hope we don't have to go through that conventional stuff about You'll let me call you Julia, wont you?

I laughed: Hardly, though I may come out with Mister Kirtley.

He slipped his arm through mine, and almost lifted me down the steps.

— Let's run the lane, right through the drifts. Come on.

And, keeping his arm locked tightly in mine, he ran—lifting me—until, breathless at the end, we grounded in a drift. He pulled me up and brushed me off.

Now, he said, we will walk back soberly and talk of many things.

We walked apart now.

See here, he began abruptly. I hope you didn't think—about the Goddard place . . .

— No, I couldn't think that. But I did wonder a little . . .

— Why? rather than how?

— Well, yes, I wondered if . . .

— It meant that I was coming back here to live?

I was silent before his instant grasp of my deepest wanting to know; he too, for a long moment as we walked the lane, turning back to the pike again. At last:

— I can't answer your wonder yet. Within myself I am ready now; but there are complications that a whole life has woven around the inner simplicity of wanting to return here. But in any case that isn't why I bought the Goddard place. I suppose I must take you into my confidence and spoil one surprise; or maybe you'll do me the favor of being surprised now and let me see how—originally—you take it.

He came closer and slipped his arm through mine again, as he said:

— I bought it as a gift to your father—not an outright one, for of course he wouldn't accept that, but just a gift of

a home, rent-free for as long as he might want it. A Christmas gift in memory of . . .

He went silent to—the memory; but we walked on closely in this silence, somehow—close—in its knowledge. I was beyond answering for Father, because of Janet. My silence grew into thought of her. He read it from me.

— She does not like it here? You think she might prevent him?

I just nodded.

— I can understand that because of Vic. But I thought he might be free where—I am not.

I rallied from my own constraint to tell him about Father at the sale. We turned down the lane for the third time. He was taking some hope from what I was telling him: about Father wanting to buy the place without any money, about the bedroom set. I kept on talking of the sale, until it was a story told him—not ours, now, but the Widow's. He had heard briefly what had happened to her, but not what I told him now. In the way I have written it, the story came to tell him—as all the others had come: he was its release for me, in word and meaning.

We started up the lane for the sixth time as I finished, breathless, from all the words coming in a rush to tell him. He had listened with interest in her; but when he spoke, his words were of me. He was smiling at me, in a way I could feel without seeing.

I only wish, he said, that your father was as bound to stay here as you are.

— Bound? I? How do you mean?

— By each thing that happens, bound, a little farther. You've entered so far into the life here that you won't be able ever to leave it, even if he goes. It all seems to have deepened to destiny itself for you.

I could see how far my fullness of feeling was betraying me! I stood aghast at the confidence of myself that I had too fluently given.

— Oh, I'm sorry! I have gone too far again. You must separate me from what I have said; I don't mean that I personally . . .

Maybe not you personally, he said, but you—*you* . . .

He breathed the word: he gave it that meaning it had for me—on Hilda, and at the table. That glimmer of recognition came again as we stood here in the snow. I thought: If I look up I will actually see this other self in him that is being released by something similar in me. I dared not look! Feeling had begun to increase again toward the insupportable. I was too tired for it now: the day had been long with all the years of my life still to come in it. This time I could not bear it: should I remain with him, I felt that I must necessarily limit and reduce and make personal this being of ours together.

If you don't mind, I'll go in now, I said. I am tired.

I am sorry, he said formally. I've kept you too long.

I walked ahead, small and alone again, with the night large and cold around me, and too white with the snow, with no color that the heart could feel, in its fatigue of feeling—not even one of a rose remembered.

* * *

The days that followed were not a passage in time but a movement in space over snow. Prue came riding on Lariat, leading behind her a black draft horse, almost as old as the white one.

If you're running a home for aged horses, she said to Kirtley, I'll give you this one. I take them all in, down my

way, rather than have them killed. I have three on hand now should you want more!

She told us: I could hardly get through the snow. Really I must go back at once, or I can't get there.

But I urged her to stay. For I saw that battle against loneliness again in her eyes. The nights of one life, I knew, could recur; they were never definitely over. I felt that she was wanting to stay, even before I discovered a dress and pajamas in her saddlebag.

It was a temptation, she confessed. It has been so lonely. If only Jed and I could be as we were before! But we can't, Julie; that is over as an age in my life, or my being another size or shape.

I had taken her up to my room; we were alone when she said this.

Oh, Julie! she cried, covering her face suddenly: I am so afraid, so afraid! Life is like something released in me. But to what end, what end!

I held to her and she clung—crying, with a short relief of tears. Then she came striding out of them. She put her face under cold water, ran a wet comb through her black hair, forming the one wave she permitted it, stuffed woolen shirt into her breeches and was ready for a day out-of-doors.

— Well now, I'm here, and it is gorgeous weather, and Kirtley is grand, isn't he? I didn't remember how nice he is, not only about horses but Drake. Lutie told me . . .

It was so good to hear this of him—'he is grand'—so good to hear nice warm things said about him. How much a girl I was, hearing his name mentioned and praised with all the praise my own thought bore him! It was so companionable to have Prue here in my room with me, sister in the womanhood I was so newly feeling, the lesser and the large ways of it.

Kirtley and Father and Dirk had gone off with the two horses hitched to the wood sled to have new runners made for it and for the old bobsled they had found in the barn. Kirtley was jubilant over the snow, as Prue was. It almost never happened in the Valley, they said. Only she was equal to his enthusiasm. Yes, I thought, there is something man-wise about Prue: it is this way she has of living outside herself, in activity for its own sake. It was a physical self-loss, as Lutie's was one of soul and Zayda's of spirit. I had before me the three witnesses of the requirement I had myself yet to meet.

In the afternoon of the first day we went up to the Forest for more wood. Kirtley and I walked to relieve the pull up the hill. At the top he told Father to drive on; he wanted to stop a moment and look in on Old Hayes. Then he asked me to come with him. I hesitated, but he urged. So we went, plunging almost knee-high into the snow that was banked against the wall.

Today the sun was shining, with snow only falling from the trees in sudden blown showers of flakes, petal-large and soft. The whole valley lay, white-gleaming, diamond with the whole year's colors. We looked upon it over the snow-cruised top of the wall, through the black enchasement of pine trunks and branches. We did not climb the wall, not wanting to break into the glazed and jeweled curve of snow upon it. We just stood against it, looking over—and in—upon the dead buried thrice over with a white burial of shining beauty. I had a sense of dying myself into this chaste beauty: I felt faint looking into the snow crystals that lay as close as stars in this inverted heaven of a place. They were not just symbol, but a revealed reality of the immeasurable design and the divine intention of clarity, in the simple witness of snow. A moment more of it and I thought I must go down, under the

unsupportable weight of creative activity. He seemed to know my feeling, for he put an arm under mine to support me. I leaned against him gratefully, and with closed eyes.

Within, again, the picture was all of whiteness. But now for the heart to feel there was an image of red against this. Not of a rose, but of an apple: within the white covering on Cordelia's grave, I felt it lie—livingly—in flesh I could smell and taste, remembering . . .

In the evening we tried the big hill, on the bobsled. He and Prue took it first, over an unbroken crust, red-glazed by the setting sun. Dirk held back, because of his arm; and I with him. I was not quite equal to such swift flight. I was too breathless for it. He and Prue were of these hills as Dirk and I were not; and of snow, and other elements. We took it several times, however. Prue rode behind Dirk and was clever in the way she steadied him, so that he did not mind but rather took her pleasure in the sport. He lost his balance, even so, when the sled took a ski-jump halfway down the hill; and he pulled us all off with him. Prue had so firm a grip upon him that it did not loosen to the fall, and they rolled off together—laughing. But Dirk would not go back. I could feel that it might be—from pleasure too acute . . .

Kirtley and Prue rode on and on, tireless as children. Once I heard him say to her: I wish I had brought my younger boy; he would love this. I wanted to, but something prevented . . . This added to a certain estrangement I was feeling from him, in his jubilation in the snow. But I knew this as a kind of relief from what I felt with him, up there against the wall.

* * *

Now that Christmas Day itself was nearing, all our thought turned to Little Handy. He took into himself the meaning of the time at hand, in being as he was, Child, beyond all per-

sonal definition. Little Handy was so essentially this: Zayda seemed to have borne him into the state itself instead of into any single identity as her child. He loved her, but not singly or separately as his mother: love was endless in him, and ready to stream toward anyone who asked for it. In all children, at a certain age, love so rises and streams forth for a little while; but shortly it finds definition in some claim made upon it. Zayda made none of the usual claims, but sought rather to divert Handy from her. And, too, she took every care to prolong this age, that she called the Age of the Heart, by holding back the development of his mind. He appeared backward for this reason; but Zayda seemed to have some inner knowledge of what she was doing—one of her immediate perceptions; and it was true and apparent, that Handy's 'backwardness' was making a rich inner contribution to his life of feeling, and imagination.

I heard her and Kirtley talking one day of this way Handy was.

Kirtley said: Your thought of a Child is different from most, Zayda; it is almost the opposite—you seem to retard in him what others would develop.

Her answer contained what in other connections she had said to me, about growing and growth.

— There is time yet: each part of our nature has its own time to grow in, and this is the time for the heart and the feeling of things in him. Let thought come later in its own time: would you ask fruit of a plant when it is only up from its root?

Handy himself was the living reference of her words: the loving and lovely way he was. This was a matter of being itself, it was nothing he said or did. In speech he was shy and backward; in action, slow, and not clever. His charm was one of pure quality or essence; and it was something one

knew by his effect upon oneself, rather than by an observation made of him. He was—some pure unrelated warmth to be felt about one's own heart as he came running with shy trust toward one; or some new imagination in the mind when he asked Story of it, or spoke himself in a word or two, one fantasy or another. He had such power as Zayda had: of communicating out of himself to another; and of creating in the other what he required. It seemed to be some power of the heart wherein love was the creative motivation.

So was he Child, as no other could better be it, for our celebration of Christmas.

He had been staying home with Zayda's mother; but now Kirtley and Father rode up to get him. Handy and Father had some perfect, implicit, all but wordless relationship to each other by now; but it was one characterized by a concession of itself to others. Whenever Dirk was around, it was one made to him. Now it was to Kirtley. When they came back, Handy was riding in front of Kirtley. I saw again that glow of fatherhood about Kirtley; and suffered estrangement; and knew yet a little more how much I had to overcome in myself. I had been having many such moments in the days past. Strangely, however, there was none when he spoke of her, of Vic. It was never 'my wife'; always 'just Vic,' and in a way that was dry and barren, that wore through all covering in him, all concealment of how he felt her. And he spoke this way too of the older boy, whom he associated always with her. But the younger! 'My younger boy, Little Kirt,' he would say. And all the warmth and feeling-fullness with which he could speak would come into his voice. Little Handy seemed to recall the boy to him, as if in both alike there was this essence of Child. Child!—in the full inner meaning of Child at Christmas.

So Christmas—night before. And all of us around a tree, trimming it. Prue was staying, and not only because of the snow. Kirtley said he needed Lariat to go about with Father. And even Dirk had asked her! Only Janet withheld persuasion; but then Janet, in her velvet house-gown, was going about in exclusion from all of us, in some new image of herself that she wished to project before Kirtley, as the Colonel's wife. Janet could not prevail with any objection implied or spoken, against the all-kindly mood of Christmas.

Christmas Eve—and a tree to be trimmed while, upstairs, a child slept against its enchantment to come. Walk softly, and so speak! This is a night for secrecy, for creeping and whispering; for the very stealth of snow, in moving about and placing. Janet gave up the image now, she went down on her knees with the rest of us, before the tree, to decorate it and wrap gifts. We had not been able to go to the city: we had no gifts for one another, and only what we could get in the village for Handy, save the big books of pictures that Kirtley had brought with him. But Zayda said we had more than enough; there was no need for anything but the tree and the splendor of the tree. She had brought him up to few toys and tools. He had all the living things on the Farm: why burden him with images? Still Kirtley and Father had exhausted the stores in the village, at the last moment. Kirtley said ruefully: I can't quite make your grade of Christmas simplicity, Zayda; I am too much used to affluence with children, at Christmas.

Now as—around the tree—we all moved, trimming and wrapping, Zayda scolded Kirtley for the multiplicity of things he had gotten for Handy. What he answered stood forth out of all else whispered and smiled and softly spoken:

— They all resolve into simplicity, Zayda, into the three gifts—no more.

What were the three gifts? I wondered to myself, as I laid the cotton-likeness of snow on the tree. I was spellbound within by the thought: were there but three gifts after all, but three gifts to be given? Was it all in the legend, all, all that could be? And this the simplicity—this resolving of all into itself? And I had a new sense of the season and its Story: how magnificent it was, not with a complexity of word and meaning, but with a simplicity magnified.

As I laid cotton on the tree, Prue threaded it with tinsel, running round and round. Dirk, tall, and Kirtley, taller, fastened candles and stars on the uppermost branches; and Father at the mirror base, with Janet helping him, scattered gifts wrapped in snow forms. Zayda and Cleony from the kitchen brought the gingerbread men and animals, as fast as they cooled and crispened.

I was standing on tiptoe to reach a higher branch, but not able quite to make it. Kirtley, in coming round the tree, gave me a quick lift from the waist, as—that day—on Hilda. When he set me down again I looked up to him, to ask my wonder.

— What are the three gifts?

From his answer I knew whence my thought had come—from one that was contained in those words he had said to Zayda.

Which three? he asked. These that are here, or the three ultimate ones?

These for Handy, I said. It is too much to think of the others.

He stood close behind me and dropped one hand lightly on my shoulder.

Look up, he said. See for yourself, or feel them.

Light, I said, and warmth, and—what? Color?

— No, try again, that is in light.

It was so lovely, standing in this way: lightly close to him, and with him above me, and before me the sweet green odor of the pine, with the white lying cool upon it. If I might always:—never move, never more than this, only this, simply, sweetly, and forever.

I had to make an effort to find the third gift.

— Movement? from the wheels of the things you've bought him?

— No, try again. It is something more inward, we're resolving *into* now; you're getting out of bounds.

I could not 'resolve' it. So, laughing, he reached with his other hand, with one still on my shoulder, and he lifted a little gingerbread lamb from the tree and put it into my mouth.

Taste, I exclaimed. And he laughed.

— Yes, he will remember this when the wheels are forgotten.

Candles and firelight and gingerbread, and I standing here! I will remember, I thought, I will always remember!

* * *

We had gone to bed early, Prue instantly to sleep, but I unable. I sat at the window, without a light, not needing one with stars so close that they were as candles in a window not much farther away than the Goddard house lay, up the road from this eastern end of El House. I was still remembering, and more—still standing somewhere in myself, with embodied delight. Yet within my thought there was greater sensation from what he had said to me, remembered: brush of word in the mind was greater even than arm across shoulder. And sitting here I foresaw: I might bear his actual absence,

touch withheld, denied me, if only thought might be interchanged, bringing this light to my thinking, this flame of it within me. If he would write and I answer! Only so, I felt, would I ever write again: words would come only to his evocation of them in me. And if I could not write, I who so long had lived in words, for whom words had life coming toward me out of a mystery of their future life-meaning for me; if I should go barren of words—how bear it? What the barren womb of the body meant to another woman, the barren mind to me!

Defense of my need rose with a flaring question: Why should this be denied me? It would be taking nothing that belonged to another, nor even what another wanted of him, or believed, or created him capable of giving. What I would claim would only be what I as myself would command into existence, both in him and in myself. What connection this, with any other? Objection seemed to come, as if out of the thought-body of all thought that formed against such creation of the spirit, of being free and claiming freedom: But the mind steals from the body, rises from it and returns, wears only a thin disguise of its origin which under stress it must abandon. And this thought, already formed and holding itself final against the nature of man and his destiny, taunted me further: How long would the letter and the word satisfy you? Now you sit drugged with the first contentment of love, he is not far away, you are content to have it so. But when he is gone and time passes, a year or years, and there is no touch whatever and no presence, and when you must face the danger of losing him to all that is in existence as bone and blood to claim him—what then?

I could not deny this danger, I could only go flaring in thought toward an assertion of freedom for life and love from it: possible, still to be proved, but—possible. And still

I protested its possibility in us both, of something creative between us of that love—difficult . . .

The stars gleamed, not with reflection of this thinking but rather original of it, my thought their reflection in the moment. Looking to the stars, with my mind as mirror of them, I thought: In such a way he and Father knew the moon and the sun. This was their experience of light, of all things giving it, man having only to receive. However short the time of such seeing might be, at least for this moment, as I sat here, no shadow of self, no construction of thought, fell further upon my sitting in the light of the stars' own infinite being. Now there was only light, given and received: no more thinking or wanting or longing: just light as signal flashing, and light as message received.

Because all was so simply and directly light in this way, I was long in becoming aware, in terms other than starlight, of a glow in the sky up the road where the moons rose. It was not the time of a moon; but I had small sense of time: the world of my awareness was the celestial one that gave the order of time to the earth, but was not itself ordered by it. I had a strange sense that all the orbs of light, of day and night and of one sphere and another, were within sight from where I sat. Therefore when I first became aware of the glow I thought of the moon rising. This brought me to a vague time-memory—that it was not the time of a moon. Still I persisted in thinking in stellar terms and thought of a comet. Only when I had exhausted all such explanations did I come to . . .

Fire! Fire up the road, fire on the hilltop, fire at—the Goddards'. Yet for a second longer I sat stunned, wonder coming: What does one do? Fire in the country? Cold and snow and no water, and the great distances?

* * *

I wakened Prue. I pulled her from the couch to the window, unable to speak, having to show her. Still half asleep, dream-enwrapped with a bright dream that all but shone from her, she stared at first, unseeing. But when she saw she was instant with action. She reached for her clothes, words and action one as she said:

— Get everybody up. We must go.

I went down the hall to the first room, that was Dirk's. He was still sleeping in the east wing though Father and Janet had moved back when the wind changed. I wakened him without voice, for I had none beyond a whisper. But somehow I told him: Fire—at the Goddards'—we must go! Then I crossed to the west wing, to the room against the hill. There was a light, and the door was slightly open. I called his name with all the voice I could command, though it was slight still. He did not answer. So I went in. He was sitting up in bed in dressing robe, asleep, book fallen from his hand, the lamp burning. For a flash of time I forgot the fire and my errand: I looked to the book and saw it was the Letters; and I looked into his face—sleeping . . . Was it not, within that thought of love? The instant over, the fire returned, and I called and called with my rising excitement:

— Oh, wake up, wake up! It is fire, fire at the Goddards'.

He woke with a start. Was it to the word fire, or to my presence? He cried my name and leaped from the bed and came toward me, all too eagerly. Oh, if it need not have been the fire, if this could have been between us, another of those moments! But I had to cry to myself as to him: It is fire, fire at the Goddards'. I saw it from my window.

Then I turned to run from the room and waken Father.

Downstairs, Prue was the first. Kirtley followed, and I was behind him. Then there were Father and Dirk, not quite dressed, drawing on shirts and sweaters. Kirtley had to stop once to lace up a boot somehow. For myself, I only knew much later what I had on: still pajamas and a dressing gown, only more things over them, all I could find, of scarfs, coats and sweaters. Janet was here only as a voice, pitched above all our excitement: You can't mean you are going . . . in this cold . . . middle of the night . . . risking your life . . . leaving me alone . . .

But we all just went on, Zayda joining us, having heard or seen for herself. She and Prue went ahead toward the barn, Zayda with a string of buckets and pails. Not much use, I heard her say: Water'll freeze; still we can throw snow with them. And she called back to me: Miss Julia, go back to the kitchen and bring all you can find there.

By the time I got back to the barn, Kirtley was mounted on Hilda and leaving. Prue and Father had the black and the white horse hitched to the sled. I had only time to jump on as they turned shortly from the yard. Zayda had it piled high with everything she could get together: every sort of pail, ropes, blankets, sacking, brooms.

Now Prue cried, suddenly remembering: We forgot to phone it!

But Zayda said: I did that before I came; I rang everyone on the line. Maybe someone will get there even before Mister Kirtley, to save her.

Only then did the blaze of the word Fire catch in my mind, and create the burning picture: house and room, and in it a woman, trying to move—but unable. I saw a picture in the very air before me: of the Widow as she had looked on the day of the sale, bending to her leg to lift it . . . My foot's

asleep . . . I'm afraid. Then that smile, that look of glorified-by-loss. Even so, it doesn't matter!

But, seeing her through the flame, I prayed: Don't let her say that to the fire. Merciful God, don't let her say that!

* * *

The old white horse was but going home. Fleetly he went, as he would never have gone in another direction. The old black horse lagged, but on the white horse went, pulling him also. Father stood driving, feet far apart, planted firmly. Behind him Prue and Dirk knelt, holding lanterns; and now and again Prue flashed a light to one side of the road to keep Father to it. Almost prone, Zayda and I—in the heap of things we had somehow amassed together.

The ruts were deeply made in the snow and held us to them. We rode evenly; and so swiftly that, on the low level of the sled, I felt myself breasting the snow with aerial movement. Numb already with the cold, I felt less and less embodiment. All sense passed into one of breath, breath and movement. The end of the way was forgotten in an overpowering sense of flight: I knew briefly an ecstasy of the weightless, bliss of pure movement. And in large measure the sense remained, even when we reached the fire, and I had myself to move and bear weight.

* * *

Fire in the night, fire on the snow! It was a fantasy of terror and splendor that threaded into each other with ceaseless running activity. There was no one picture to see now or remember afterward: as soon as one formed, smoke screened it or flame consumed it, or new appearances of human faces and forms altered it. Others had come by the time we arrived; not many, but they moved so fast they were an al-

most continuous line running from house to cistern, back to house. . . . It was blurred, confused, in all its aspects: of white and black, cold and hot, silence and hissing sound. I melted myself into the confusion of those carrying water and snow from the cistern and well, into the smoking doorways. At first I forgot Father and Dirk and the others: I was without my own identity as I ran in the running line for water; or, if another were there before me, for snow. When for a long time I did not think of him, it was only because I was not thinking either of myself or of anyone, but only of black and white and red burnishing both, and cold and hot, and the acutely sensitive and the utterly numb, and running and stopping, tired enough to fall, and falling; but getting up again and running . . . Only after many moments did the thought come—of her who might be inside still, and of him trying to find her. Before, all was simply effort to get inside, to make a way, such a fantastic entrance to the inner red peril, white-plastered, as to a cave of crystal with water freezing to points . . .

But now when the thought came, when somebody said her name to give rise to it, it bore me through that frozen portal, unseeing of all else but her, and him trying to find her. I ran in, with bucket full of water, throwing it before me. With bucket empty I ran on, just running and looking and calling. The downstairs had not yet caught, but smoke was sudden, and the atmosphere was all of fire, red and hot. In a downpour of smoke through the staircase that was snow-white and snow-wet, through the smoke I ran into someone—scent familiar even through the smoke; man, and I knew him . . . Oh, Father! With voice almost smothered he cried: Jay, go back! Stay outside. Just keep the stairs wet, the door open . . . But I followed him as he started up the stairs: Where is—? The name stifled in me. He was only

voice now, no sight: I'm looking. So is Kirtley. Go back—we'll find her. Then he vanished, as voice, as presence, as will, commanding me. At the same time from behind me someone pushed by: it was Prue. For a second, smoke cleared for me to see her. She gained a step or two on me and disappeared . . .

The hall at the head of the stairs was free of the fire except for sudden gusts of smoke. I stood there for a moment, choked and blinded; but then the air cleared: it was odd, going so clear, with all standing as a hallway yet, in the light of a lamp still burning, with pictures and a mirror, table, chair and rug—in a small, cornered seclusion of safety. It tempted me almost to disbelieve the danger, and to sit down and rest. But I turned from it into a room . . .

There, in the very moment, staggering into it from the next room, carrying her, prostrate enough to be dead—he came.

I had one instinct at the sight, to get help, and not only for her but for him whose exhaustion was in his step, and in his face that came white through the ruddy dusk of the room. I fled to the hall, calling to Father; crossing it to the rooms on the other side I went through two rooms, not burning but smoke-filled, before I had an answer. It was from Prue. But she said: I'll get him. I told her where, and then made a blinded way back to the hall. He had reached it with her; he was resting a moment in the doorway, in the clearing; for again the hall was clear, with that look of safe detachment from the rest of the house. He was dazed, but a faint recognition of me came as I ran to him, crying: Father's coming to help. Then Father was there, and Prue, and in the same moment Dirk, coming up the stairs with water, throwing it as he came. They took her from Kirtley, all

three bearing her rigid weight, going down the stairs sideways. Then I turned back to him . . .

But he had fallen! He was on the floor between room and hall, fallen from exhaustion. I ran and fell on my knees beside him and cried the danger: We must go. Oh, do try! We must go before the hall catches.

He gasped: You go, I'll be able, in a minute.

— But I won't leave you!

I took a wet end of my dressing gown and laid it against his forehead. I thought we had that moment: no smoke was blowing in from the back of the house; the hall still held that look of a magically ringed safety. I held his head and cooled his face all over: it was such dear service that, even if I had not felt safe, I should have snatched this moment in face of death to give it to him.

He was revived by the cool wetness, and opened his eyes and smiled, in isolated ease and pleasure, as I within was smiling. Before I was recalled, he . . .

Julia! he cried, and struggled to get up: We must go!

He gripped me with his knowledge of our need to go, and together we turned to the staircase. But now heat came rolling toward us like a great wave of water. It did not blind but gave terrible sight. As if taking a breaker of water, I closed my eyes and bent my head, trying to find cover against it; and he bent over me to protect . . . But, however closed and covered—hot against my eyes—red vision of fire!

It was yet only a sight, not yet the flame itself. But when I looked up from the sheet of it as it passed in the wind, I saw all still through a red film, as if in that moment it had burned into my eyes, forever after to color all I should see.

And this! Before us, standing as one against it, the whole back wall of the staircase was an empty studding of fire through which, from the hollowed emptiness of rooms be-

hind it, the wind blew in our direction. He covered my eyes, but still I saw—through them closed—the fiery structure, beginning that moment to lean!

The window! he cried. The porch—we must jump.

Perhaps he did not actually speak the words: we may only have had the thought of them together. We went back to the window, and there he let me go, for a moment, to open it. But before he lifted me through it, once more a wave came—black now with smoke, but red-shot with flame. It cleared, and he bent to lift me, his eyes very close . . . Then, for yet another instant, and not by fire or smoke, we were held. By one of those moments between us, flashing and burning into our innermost awareness of each other, as with fire. Brighter, and more burning. Only this did not burn vision away, but gave it.

(I cannot say 'we' now, not 'we saw.' Of such vision one can only speak for oneself, no matter what likeness one shares with another. Always it must be—the way it came to *me*. For not exactly so can it come to another: here is the soil of individual knowing as there is no other. Therefore I can only say I saw—or for me it was this way.)

O moment repeated! To have you come to me now and hold me to the recognition! I should bid you pass, I should lower my eyes and say, I will not see! For to see now might be death. I should stay blind to all but the window, while there is yet time to escape through it. Still—against death itself I must hold this moment! For it is pregnant, by its very nearness to death, with all my life to come—that is not—of any one time or mortality, any one living or dying, having or giving up . . . It is a moment rarely granted, one on the border: it is neither of life nor of death, but of both. And only as it is of both can it bear such full vision. It is my moment come—like Father's on that night, like Zayda's at the Pit!

'Some time you will come to it—you look like a person to whom it might happen!' Moment of eternal remembrance: wherein lies the inner continuity, the thread of true destiny. Love is the revealing power, and this, the revelation: this continuity that all things bear within themselves, *that my life bears to his*, but only for an end beyond both: of freedom and setting free—to Life itself, the One Destiny of man and earth, weaving through all others. What Lutie is to Drake, Cordelia to Clive—yes! before me the same requirement, of freedom and setting free, through boundaries of life and death.

This was the shock going deep enough! This, my moment in the Pit! But the yield was less one of remembrance than one of foresight, as of Destiny itself, that One Destiny. As if memory were the baptism by water, and this was the beginning of the one by fire—a burning, forging consciousness. If it might last long enough, before life or death claimed me, it would forge an Image! One in its first faint intimation began to take a kind of form in the fire, as of Man in the fullness of its spiritual stature, creating himself into a new existence. But—it did not last long enough; I could not bear the vision! Oh, blindness of life or death, let me be blind to this sight, let me see no farther than the next step with him, in this endlessness!

* * *

All this was a flash, taking but a second—something left in me rather than realized at the time. But it was a definite time of suspense, of being held. And he shared it with me in some way—not very different. For he spoke the temptation that came to me, to hold me where I was a little longer, until it was too late.

— We might die together as we might not be able to live!

I was tempted—in an ecstasy of vision, an impatience for the long way glimpsed before us, and all the time for it. It was he who resisted for us both, and made the decision.

— No, no, this is the second time it has come—to make me see—we must live it, we have it all to live!

And then he made the effort, lifting me through the window, out onto the porch roof. There all became an opposite confusion: of snow and ice, night and stars, human voices, and my own name called: Jay! Jay!

All that followed was words. I heard the word ladder and felt for it with my feet. I climbed down on so many words spoken from below to support me. My body was entirely without sensation: all was mind into which words were being inserted, for thought to descend upon. At last, ground: this too was a word, but one that received me with firmness. No bodily sense returned until, in looking up to a name shouted, I saw—still on the roof but ready to step off into—flame again, smoke and flame . . . Then all was body, and his body falling—mine in his . . .

* * *

When thought returned, it hung in the suspense of his falling. Dizzily it came back to me, in visible movement. It was not long as time goes; but thought has its own durations. Were I ever able to retrace that interval of unconsciousness, it would be many thought-years, and they would reach, I believe, into the past rather than the future.

I found myself lying in a shed, on the floor, with my head in the softness of Prue's arms, and with Dirk standing close over me. But I was only impatient of their being with me, all my thought on him, seeking him. Prue understood and pointed me to where he lay not far away, at the same time reassuring me:

— He is all right except for a broken leg. Your father is splinting it.

He was looking for me!—searching with my single search. He was able to speak before I was:

— Sure you're all right?

— Oh, yes, but you—?

— Nothing but a cracked bone.

Then for a second his eyes shone as if he had seen—or were seeing again—in me, or about me, or through me . . .

* * *

Home then, on the sled, as the dawn came. I remembered suddenly: It is Christmas! It came, not with a foreglowing of red, diffused and atmospheric, as most dawns come, but with sharp and definite outraying, with sudden bursting splendor. We faced it in riding backwards, he lying with his head in my hands that held him against the sled's movement. Prue and Dirk were driving; Father had gone back on Hilda, and Zayda was staying with the Widow until we might drive back in the car for her. She had suffered another stroke when the fire came; she was to be brought to Hayes El; we were to get a room ready for her.

As the sun rose so splendidly, I lifted his head a little, for him to see it. For I wondered if it could be as red, as bright, as I saw it. Was this the natural splendor, or was I still seeing through fire? I bent to ask him.

— Do look and see the sun—and tell me: Is it as bright as I see it, or is the fire still in my eyes?

He looked for a moment, then sank back against my arm and closed his eyes.

— Why do you ask me? Must not my sight be the same as yours since we saw—the fire together?

We rode the rest of the way in silence while, for me, the

day came as a countenance lifted—flaming brow, burning eyes and then one countenance of light, in radiant expression. Either I was bringing fire to the scene, or I was seeing with new vision into the very nature of all things that were—of fire and light. Or was there in the time at hand some special enlightenment? In Christmas, morning of Christmas? The very nature of snow was of fire, the banks on the side of the road were as flames running to the speed of the sled. Almost in the dawn, as in the fire, I came to see that Image as I rode: delineated in the sun, spanning the world, as if all appearances in time and space were but an outpicturing of an inner nature, and this picture before me was one of the inner nature of the time, this time of Christmas. And the intimation came again, of the World-Image, now word-described—with words already given in a Story . . . And the glory shone round about them.

The picture with its words flashed away as it came. But it left a thought of itself, reflected from the glowing scene around me. And this thought was: If Truth has any color in the mind, it is white; and if Love—color of sun on snow.

JANUARY

Song of the Stars

No more snow fell: the air grew too cold for its activity: stiff, the air grew, and itself immobile. But the snow lay unbroken on the ground through Christmas week, frozen fast under a last covering of ice, its oneness preserved. It was still the same snow and the first; and, from the increasing coldness in the air, likely the last. It might last all through January, Zayda said; sometimes a winter happened like this, though rarely.

The nights became all prominent with stars; their light was condensed in the cold clarity of the air in a way almost to be felt tangibly, as solid substance; and into a startling separate distinctness. One became aware of their infinite numbers, not vaguely, as in their soft diffusion of summer; but with a certain precision. They seemed almost calculable. And they came so close as almost to seem reachable from the open fields, if only one could get out across the rise of snow to them. They caught up the soul with a new longing by this seeming closeness: their light spun bridges over the hitherto unattainable, with a new beckoning. It was so for me, standing by windows at night, looking to them. The lane from the house went clear of its trees into their firmament. I felt the stars and the road's stones interchangeable—stones as po-

tential stars, stars as solidifying stones. Their light seemed to pour from them as a kind of sacrificial gift upon the earth as their altar. If they are dead and mineral, I thought, it is because they have given their life as light. And I felt all heaven, day and night, giving itself in this way—giving light as very life to the earth for its ultimate transformation. Stars died, stones quickened. I could imagine the earth in some far day giving forth the gift received, itself a star. It bore such a resemblance even now, in all its shining crystallizations.

In all this time I had spoken but few words alone with him, for there were many people in the house, and they seemed multiple beyond their numbers. The Widow Goddard lay in one of the front rooms, almost wholly paralyzed, but faintly conscious, and not likely to live much longer. She had rallied once to ask: Where am I? And when she was told, at Hayes El, she had smiled, and the smile was remaining on her face. Prue was staying to help with her care—Jed had brought her more clothes. He came looking so lonely that Kirtley asked him to stay on for a few days, to help him get around. The break was but a crack, he had no need to be in a cast; and we had found an old wheel chair in the attic for him to use. Yet he needed support for the least movement, so Jed stayed as one shoulder, while Dirk was the other.

He was confined to his room mostly; and sometimes I went there to read to him. But there was always movement into it or past it: we were never alone for more than a few moments. He guarded these by speaking of the fire only in connection with the Widow Goddard. Talk had begun, about the fire, how it caught. Some neighbors, visiting him, brought the word to him that was going about: that she had set fire to the house herself to keep it from coming to him. Such thought was torture to him—that he might have caused her

such final bitterness. I had over and over to reassure him—of how she had looked the day of the sale, and of how she looked now.

We talked once of the burned place. He said he meant to rebuild it and offer Father his choice, to live there, or stay at Hayes El. He had not yet spoken to Father of this; nor had I: I was too much afraid of the answer—more afraid that it might be 'I will stay here,' than 'I will not.'

But one evening—early on the eve of New Year's Day—he asked me to come up and read to him. I took poetry, for this was always his choice. Today, Francis Thompson, because of the marvelously rich imagery of heaven and earth that it brought to his confinement from it in the snowy and starry world outside. As I went up with the book in my hand, I thought how it was but one word in a whole language of words to be read and heard and spoken and written together. Out of the written word, original of some new life of its own, our relationship had sprung. Endlessly I felt it might grow, in words of others newly understood between us, and newly written by ourselves. And for this infinity we might have but an hour today, tomorrow and a week hence. Oh, burden, burden of infinity to bear in the short time of his being here!

Yet I went slowly, afraid of the moment before me. I was aware that the house was suddenly quiet and empty—by what conspiracy of event, to give us this time alone? Almost I turned back at the door, afraid to cross the threshold that began to brighten and burn in my mind. But he had heard me come, as if straining to hear; and he called me when I hesitated outside.

I felt him deliberately to be diverting himself from his sense of my approach when he asked me, as I came in: Where is everybody? it has suddenly become so quiet.

I could not account for them except in the way of which I could not speak. He beckoned me to a chair by his bed where he was sitting up, at the rather sharp angle of his leg's greatest comfort.

We must make the most of it, he said, still lightly: It is one hour in a whole week for us.

Slowly I went and sat down, trying to hold myself to the surface of things between us, even my coming in this way to read. I began to fuss with the lamp to gain time; but he bent forward and adjusted it for me, saying: But I had it fixed just right, now you've gone and changed it.

And he smiled that little humoring smile . . . He was in more possession of himself than I—he had refuge for attaining it in lying here, through hours, in silence and alone.

I began to read, a little hurriedly. I read *A May Burden*, and *July Fugitive*.

Then he asked: What of autumn, is there one for October?

I searched the book, finding *A Corymbus* for Autumn. Lusciously, almost drunkenly, the words came—'in tumbling clusters,' indeed. They overcolored whatever color they described—of sun, leaf or 'umbered juices'; they overcrowded, even, the fullness of their content. He heard it through, but said at the end:

— No, no, there is too much sound, too many words. There should be more silence between them, and more space, with only a seed left at the end of the whole year's flowering.

For me it was so too, when I remembered October: whisper of leaf-utterance, and silence of bare branch that followed. And hardly more than one word left, seed of the whole year's yielding: word with a promise of another time in it, like that the seed bears. Until!

Autumn is more of a promise than a gift given, he said. There is even more reserve in it than spending. In the bursting pod, I think, one forgets what the seed encloses. No, I would write of it differently. And you?

I could but repeat his words: I think—more promise than gift given.

Then I plunged into the book again, as he lay there and looked at me, something rising in him to be said, that I must prevent his saying.

Let me read one for the New Year, I said. There is a lovely one of stars—‘What is the song the stars sing.’

I had the page turned down and began to read hurriedly, the words tumbling over one another, the lines running together, until—‘And a world with unapparent strings knits the simulant world of things . . .’

— Julia!

Suddenly. And his hand taking the book from me.

— Look up, Julia. Don’t read those words in such a covered, hidden way.

(But if I look up he will see!)

Commanding me, almost with impatience: You read these things to me when you should look them. It is not like you to withhold yourself in this way.

When I was trembling to give! Oh, pass from me, Moment! I am not strong enough, or ready. Yet I lifted my eyes as he drew them to himself, and I went still under his hand that returned from the book he had taken from mine that had been holding it.

Your eyes, he said softly, are very bright. Is it because you are still seeing everything through fire?

Yes, I answered faintly. Only, now the snow has given it whiteness, it doesn’t burn so, and now the stars have given it distance, it isn’t all so close upon me.

Yet it is not so cold as snow, or so distant as stars? he urged. It is still warm as—love is warm?

Yes! I breathed. For now it was of no use to cover or hide: he was commanding the truth from me with love's own command. I looked all that I felt, that he had brought me to feel.

Do you know, he said, your beauty for me is this fullness, the way you are now, when you are not afraid to show or speak your innermost being? And this was the beauty of your letters. They frightened me with this beauty. What I first told you about being afraid to come to Hayes El was nothing to what I felt. And not about your father but about you. And it wasn't only what you said but also—my own hunger to hear it spoken.

He said my name again, calling it several times.

— Julia, Julia, how has this happened, and in so short a time?—when, in all my life before, I failed to bring it to be in myself or to find it in love?

My answer came with a knowledge my love had of itself.

— I think your need has created me, more than one of my own.

Yes, he said softly, it seems to be that way. You respond even with the words I would have you say. And perhaps my failure before was in my own need—it had to grow to its own fullness before it could command another to meet it. But if this is so, I fear for you more than for myself! It has all gone farther than I can keep up to outwardly. The fire has swept us—if it hadn't been for the fire we would have been years coming to this, years of seeing each other but once a year.

I've thought of that, I said: how you would have been gone by now, and it would never have come to words. And

unspoken it would have rested in the silence of leaves falling, or of snow.

I thought in October, he said, that I would not come back. I thought I would halt the inner thing until the outer could catch up to it. When I went back over there I felt too much difference, even in myself, from one way I could feel and another. And there were too many complications—my life of twenty years away from Hayes El. I tried to disbelieve you altogether or merge you back into your father. But you lived as yourself.

— You created me as that in October!

— Yes, I could feel myself doing just that; and I could not prevent it, for I was myself created in the act. It is hard to resist any act of creation, for this is the law of life. And when it is self-creation, this is the ultimate law. It commanded my return, even against other laws working. And other loves. Like that I have for—my son.

But he leaped the word and its thought.

— I came only for a confirmation. This was made when I saw you again, when you opened that door! When I found you, as I had left you! I thought then: This is enough, it is a promise for a time distantly in the future, with which I must be content. And I was keeping it so until the fire.

Yes, the fire, I said. It was like the rainstorm for Lutie and Drake. Love seems to be a force of destiny that can get into storms, and fire.

— I've been thinking of that all week. I've read your letter over and over, about Lutie and Drake. I've carried that about with me since it came, as if it were one written to me. It was written to something in me that I had always hoped of love. I found it easy to share this with Drake, to know it through him, since always he has been as some part of myself.

He gave a little groan and withdrew his hand from mine.

— If only I had stayed undivided in myself as Drake did, and waited for love, and not sought it before its true time of happening to me.

We are afraid to wait, I said. We are afraid of Time. I have been. I laid hold of thought, as you did love. I gave it premature shape.

— But you can alter that shape; you can write other books, while I . . .

Suddenly, as if very tired, he turned his head away.

— Another time I will tell you about Vic and the boys.

I got up to go, but had to stand, as on that day he had come—with yearning in my hands. Dear life! whatever else you deny me, for however long, one caress, for one moment! If he had turned back to me he would have drawn it from me. But he stayed with his head turned and his eyes closed; and, ungiven, I had to take it back into myself, mute the spoken word, and go back to my room only to write it. I went to my room and wrote him a little letter. Perhaps I would give it to him when he left, or perhaps not. But I brought it to be in words: they were lovely with my love, they shone back at me from the page. They were at least some measure of its expression. They left me a little more at peace. And my hope was still—slender and tentative but venturing certainty and strength as hope: that if he wrote to me and I to him, I could bear it.

* * *

We were to gather in Kirtley's room to see the old year out. Janet was making a party out of it—we were to have supper there, served buffet-style. Janet had changed suddenly toward us all, flaring into some kind of decision of her own, to be hostess in this house even to its host. She had

conceived a new image of herself and was projecting it: very much a woman of the world (as she assumed Kirtley was a man of it), finding this rural setting on this festive night 'so naïve,' but making the most of it. She became arch, with the arch spanning all the rest of us, even Father, in reaching toward Kirtley.

Early this evening she floated with velvet sails into his room to rearrange it for the party. Close your eyes, she said merrily, it is to be a surprise! She brought extra candlesticks and some coffee tables; she propelled Cleony upstairs to arrange things, since, probably, she hardly thought it proper for Zayda to be here.

The occasion calls for wine, she said gayly. Don't tell me you haven't some stored away somewhere.

Kirtley said: There is a wine cellar outside. Old Hayes made it his life through and hardly ever drank it. He used it as his most potent bribery. You are welcome to the distillation of time.

Now in the room—light was starred in the higher dusk of it from two tall silver candlesticks on the tallest of the chests; and it shot in meteors of bright movement below, from the fire. The candlesticks were themselves light, shifting and intermittent: they had a kind of moon existence dependent upon light from outside them. The huge bowl of chowder was liquid light where the candles beamed into it; the frosted cake beside it piled white formlessly into darkness, like snow lying upon a sill of night. The chest was only a few planes of light—red for the cherry of it, yellow for the maple; and so the rest of the furniture: none of it had full solid substance, all was but a geometrical play of light in angles and planes.

All became a creation of light for me—even ourselves. Janet, standing by the candles to serve the chowder, was a

cheek, a column of bare throat rising from the velvet dusk of her gown, a hand lifted to pour a stream of liquid light. Zayda, carrying cups, was a brighter beam moving through the room: in the yellow of her dress she was a bearer of fire-light, darting in and out of shadow. Prue and Dirk, on stools by the fire, were one glow of it: Prue—in a woman's dress, itself the color of flame! I was not in the light but outside; and so, he . . . He lay, white-covered and pillowed in bed, but shadowy in his dark dressing gown against this whiteness. Where we were, outside the light, we seemed to be sharing a free witness of it.

Father had not yet come—he was doing something or other in the barns, lingering there in a way he had. When at last he came, with more wood for the fire, he brought substance and sound and odor and other embodied qualities to the scene of light. He let in something of the night—the crack of its cold into the silence of warmth in the room. And he brought movement—new movement for the fire, and all the activity of supper. It seemed that he had taken from night and snow and barn and horse, from dung and leather and tobacco and cut-wood, all their physical and etheric qualities and had combined them in himself—strongly and redolently; and that he gave these as an earthy center for the radiance of light in the scene. I smelled and heard and tasted now—without losing, however, that oversense of light.

I think that I shall never live another hour so full of many goodnesses as this! Zayda was one of its creators, weaving and blending the web of its light enchantment; Father, the other, an entrenched center of being for all of us. Here was substance and radiation—the full circle.

We ate; and then, as Zayda was ready to leave with the dishes, Kirtley said suddenly:

— Zayda, get Handy and bring him here, and tell him a story for us all to hear.

Zayda was taken by surprise, as we all were. A shadow fell for a moment upon the bright scene: of Janet's hand, with its trailing sleeve, lifted in a futile gesture of objection; and of her suspicion, gathering to what she could not understand—the implicit relationship between Kirtley and Zayda. Zayda hesitated for a moment; but Kirtley only repeated his request, more definitely. Then she went for the child.

She brought him back in his nightclothes and a blanket robe, just as she had lifted him from sleeping. With him came a new odor into that of fire and candles, Father's pipe and Dirk's cigarette: odor of child, sweetly, cleanly acid; and of bed-warmed flannel; and, somehow, the odor of sleep.

Kirtley held out his arms for him.

— Tuck him in here with me, Zayda, so he won't feel the change.

Zayda took him to the bed. Then for a moment, as he crooked his arm behind the child, I felt a little pang for what he must be remembering—another bed, another child held warmly to him, body to body of himself. It was not a pang of jealousy, only of longing that something of me might have been in that memory, just as another gift of myself to him.

Father rose, to cover another flare of Janet's suspicion, and offered his chair to Zayda.

— My chair to the speaker of the evening. And what is to be, Zayda? Or shall we let Handy choose?

Father walked over to the bed then and sat beside it, saying to Handy: What is to be, Sonny? What story shall Mummy tell us?

Kirtley roused the child from the hovering sleepiness

about him that was as palpable as mist, and sweetly odorous. Handy was slow in coming to speak, as always: his wide eyes had something to see first, it seemed, before his mind could be informed of what was asked him. Slowly they went rolling around the room, looking at us. In the time of his choosing Kirtley spoke softly to Zayda.

— Whatever it is, weave it outside time, Zayda, weave it into some eternal recurrence for all our memories afterward.

Then he turned to Handy: Come on now. What is to be about?

Now Handy's face broke into one light of memory and anticipation.

Ducks! he said.

Zayda flashed a lovely smile back to him.

— All right, but give me a moment to fancy something about ducks out of all time.

Then, laughing, she asked Kirtley: But, Mister Kirtley, you'll grant me a season of time at least, wont you?

Season of time but not in time, he smiled back at her: No one time or place, Zayda; something that could not possibly happen.

Ducks, Handy said again, as if upon second thought, too.

Zayda visibly searched memory and imagination for Story.

I could make it geese, she said. Would geese do, Boy-Child?

Her word struck memory from him.

— Geese over the mountains?

Yes, she said, that is the one; but I'll change it, for it was always different every time it happened, and it happened every winter, come a time just before Christmas . . .

A rapturous sigh from Handy, a settling back into the curve of the arm behind him, gave his consent. As for the

rest, except Janet—not quite yet, Janet—that peculiar magic claimed us at once, that Zayda had for Story.

* * *

Winter had come early in the mountains, she began, and already the mountain children had set out for the geese in the great market beyond, to drive them home.

How many? Handy demanded, though he knew: How many mountains?

Five, Zayda said. No, seven, now that I think of it. There were two more going this way to the market. And a child for each family, and there were . . .

Little Handy held up both hands, fingers spread to the number.

Right! Zayda said. There were ten, just two big handfuls of children, small on the sides of the mountain, walking close to the wind. It was cold for November, and getting colder. They went hurrying to get there and back before the snow came that was in the air. They could feel it there, they could reach out and feel it. There is snow in the air, they said to each other: We must hurry to get there and back before the snow comes. Not that they would have minded it for themselves; but their parents had said they must get home before the night and the snow came. So they hurried along, though it was as much for the fun of running from night and snow as obedience to their parents. They were good enough children; but it must be admitted—they only hurried in spurts. Between times they'd lag or at least rest from their hurry, with a little secret wish, secret even from each other, that the snow might come. In any case, it was noon before they got to the market, and they had to buy their geese, and get them all banded together, each child a band of . . .

But Handy now forgot his cue into numbers; he tried but could not think how many. Kirtley bent and whispered a suggestion.

Hundred! he shouted.

Zayda laughed: Well, I wouldn't have said so many, but it might well have been: each year they brought a few more home apiece, so likely it was. A hundred to a child, and ten children: that makes . . .

Father, drawn into the computation, murmured: A thousand geese to drive back over the mountains? Quite a flock indeed, quite a flock.

'Normous! Handy ventured, his eyes big to the number.

Dirk proffered: Unwieldy.

And Prue, casting another line to the story-teller: How did they drive them: separate or all together?

Zayda took her choice, with vivid deliberation.

— Oh, separate! That is, in separate bands; for the road was narrow, they had to go fan-shaped like this, child behind, then a number of the geese spreading before him. It was a sight! The more so when at three o'clock exactly, just after they got started home, it began to . . .

Get dark! Handy shouted, running ahead a bit.

No, Zayda said (with the art of contradiction in Story!): No, not yet, though it got awfully dusky with clouds. First the snow came, just little feathers of it at first, so that the children thought it was only goose-feathers flying in the wind. But when it fell and fell and stuck back onto the geese, covering them all over shortly and making each twice his size at starting, why, then—then they said that it *had* happened, the Snow had come, they hadn't started back soon enough. And what is more, they couldn't make it back by Night either, with all the distance before them. But as for this distance—suddenly there wasn't any, the snow covered

it all up! It dropped a curtain right before them; there was nothing whatever but snow, no road rising or falling, no beginning, middle or end of the way back. No earth or sky, no footstep of their own behind them, none of the geese ahead. It was all just snow. Indeed, soon there were no geese to be seen under its covering. And a little after that, no child! Just so many snowflakes shaped so that you might imagine, This is a goose, or That is a child, but you could not be certain! The children, looking down upon themselves, weren't sure at all who they were. If they didn't think of their mothers, you could hardly blame them; they could only think snow, and how light it was and how lovely, and how it could move in the wind like nothing else, and how the geese were moving in it, easy as a snowflake blows. Feathers were heavy compared to snowflakes. Suddenly the geese realized this, they thought: We're much bigger than we were, but heavens, we're much lighter! There is no end to how we could fly now if we tried. And one did try, right off—he shook his wings, lifted them and lo! he went straight up as if he had no weight at all, easy as a cloud. It is true he fell down again in the same way, for he hadn't gotten his new balance; but it went to show the others what they could do if they tried and kept just normal goose-sense about staying up, once you were up. So another tried, and he stayed, and presently the whole flock followed, one by one.

— Now at the sight the children cried Oh! and Ah! and Our geese, they'll get away from us! And the child driving the first flock did a perfectly natural thing under the circumstances: he (it was a boy Handy's size) laid hold the last goose and—he went right up too! No trouble at all, no extra weight to speak of; the goose hardly noticed, and all the boy had to do was to hold on to the thinnest of thin threads, just a little collar of snow around the goose's neck:

it held everything marvelously together, one flake to another, and all to the shape of a wing, somehow. But, I must admit, he was rather a special kind of boy, like Handy; he didn't stop to think about what he was doing, saying: What if I couldn't, maybe I might not! He just went right on flying with never a doubt in his mind. But this wasn't true of the next child who tried it: he took off all right, but halfway up he began to think. Now thoughts are heavy things—they've got too much weight for flying. Just the least one will take you down to earth from wherever you are. This boy, he just began to have one about falling and—he fell! This frightened the next child, and he was afraid even to try it. So what he had to do was stumble along on foot, the whole way home.

Over seven mountains! Handy exclaimed, from above them, looking down on those two boys who had not been able to follow him.

Over seven mountains, Zayda confirmed. On foot, the whole way. How late he was going to be for supper! The long way ahead was enough to make the fourth boy try, and, having the others for an example, he kept his mind light, and he went on up. And so the fifth and the sixth and the seventh and all the rest of them. All the boy who had fallen could do was to run along under those flying, straining to keep sight of them, yearning to fly with them until he got longing in himself beyond his last doubt to rise up and follow them. But the third child never made it, he just drawled along saying to himself: It isn't true, it can't be! I wont say there wasn't a wish in him somewhere that it might be. The way was so long and he was late, not just for one supper but a whole winter of them. He had to stop night after night with people who lived on the side of the mountains, who themselves got stuck somehow, in passing over them. But

the others, they went on without him, even the one still on the ground, running and trying a little to fly and flying now and again a little. They all kept themselves light-minded like a goose—a goose simply does not think, you know; that is why he is called a goose. All the children had to do was to remember not to; that kept their heads light, and there didn't seem to be any weight anywhere else.

So the flight home began, she said. And then she described it from the air—taking us with her (we who would follow!), world dropping away, our bodies losing weight as, one by one, over seven mountains we went, flying all the hard places, never descending any lower than the tree tops. Through evening, turning blue as the geese were, so that the people living on the sides of the mountain saw no difference in color or shape—child, goose and evening clouds all one color. Through the night, rising to starry realms of sky: through it to morning, flying through crimson, the color staining the snow garments. On past where they were to stop, in Time and Place, but back again, to Time as it moved slowly on earth, to Time for Supper. . . .

Slowly the enchantment of the others began to break my own. Little Handy's, where he was listening, on his knees now, blanket thrown off, taking his goose astride, driving it where he would. Now the time had come—that day when he was big enough: Now I can go off even without Mummy and fly mountains higher than ever she went, so high I'll never come back. I'll go higher than she says, so high goose can't make it, he'd be too heavy, nor snow even. I'll go on wings of nothing at all but the wind, and I won't stop flying until I get to God!

Then Zayda's: where she was, leaning forward, face and breast in the firelight: the enchantment of her own words: Air is no empty thing; it is full of shapes, once you see into

it. Any bird knows, any goose, theirs is no empty world!

And Dirk's: it was not one of the flight—Dirk had not taken off, he was one who had a thought and had fallen . . . Still he was looking after the others, his heart pounding against the thought of being lifted free of its last boundary. If I might! If only give myself to love simply! To her strength weakly! To her will, willing! She is beautiful with all the beauty I have disbelieved, true with all truth, strong with all strength. How can I *not* trust myself to her?

And Prue's: I have gone before you, geese; I have ridden the way. It lies not only in the air, you silly geese, but on the earth. Right over the mountains it lies, on the road of rock crossing them. A horse can take it, and any good rider. And I do not need snow, nor the shape of wings—I can take it with my own shape, man-strong but formed like a woman. Riding below, I can keep up with you—yes, through night and dawn and back again. If it is Time you are flying, Geese, I can keep up with you!

At the risk of breaking the enchantment I gave myself up to Janet next, trying to follow her. She was the one who went stumbling along, with eyes on the ground: who had to stay with the people who live on the sides of the mountain, who only looked up and could not make out whether bird or child, or cloud . . . What is happening? she was questioning the magic and so breaking it. All this is absurd, a child's story, simple nonsense. What can be possessing everyone, what is taking Larry . . . Larry, Larry, where are you going in yourself, that I can't reach you? It is a child's story, I tell you, nothing but nonsense!

Yet, even as Janet denied the tale any parable of meaning, she went stumbling and sobbing in herself, like that child in the story. And I felt her yearning to be: Oh, to be so young or so old as to believe it possible!

And Father, sitting there by the bed, largish in a straight

chair that was too small for him—not sitting straight as usually he sat, but bent, as if with the first feeling of his years, and thinking: I am growing old to your youth, Little Handy; in this moment I am closer to you than the others. It is altogether conceivable to me that a goose knows what a man does not; and that is how to lift himself from the last level of his wings. Yes, it is altogether conceivable . . .

Conceivability, not any one conception, played in a smile about his pipe, as he listened; and, at the last, when he lifted his eyes to the story's end, it came into his eyes—of 'air not empty but full of shapes, once you see into it.'

To Kirtley I did not look. He lay behind Little Handy as if he wished to be hidden. I felt him in a moment between two times of his life from which I must withhold myself, to give him its free decision.

Zayda was the first to break the charm of her story upon us. She arose and went for Handy, saying: But now he must be getting back to bed. And she took him—still absent in the air, flying . . .

The clock stood at twelve as she went, striking the first bell, as she said: Good night, and a really new year to you all.

One more it struck before the rest of us were released: Janet first, suddenly and completely, but released not into the present but—it seemed—into the whole past of her life. At the third bell she jumped to her feet and reached into the shadow on the chest behind the candles, for the decanter of wine. It was dark wine, almost black, which came into the gleams of the red and purple of its grapes only as the light enlivened them. To four striking, Janet poured the first glass, nervously splashing it, saying nothing yet, just hurriedly pouring one glass after another, as five, six, struck in the slow toll of twelve, and then seven . . .

She bore the first glass to Kirtley, a second to Father, and

then snatching up one for herself, leaving the rest of us to reach for our own, she cried, between nine striking, and ten:

— A toast, a toast!

Father rose then, before eleven. He spoke quietly, but with strength.

— Very well then, a toast, to the New Year at Hayes El.

And he and Kirtley drank it, but not the rest of us. There was no time. For Janet had refused and cried her refusal in another moment.

— No, no, no! Not the New Year but the Old. To the past, to memory, to what we all seem to have forgotten!

And, as twelve sounded, her glass lifted high, her eyes overbright, her voice rose, and her words crowded toward hysteria.

— To your absent wife, Mr. Hayes! And you, Larry, to our meeting in Paris, to love in my life at last!

Her voice mocked all her words. She drank half the wine. Then, with eyes still brighter, she turned to us—to Dirk and Prue and myself—young to the promise that was unfulfilled in herself: each of us in the moment, with that inner trembling of youth that bears up the full-blown burden of being. In Prue and myself she must have felt this: from us taken the torture of hope and expectation that brought her to her last bitter words, to the peak and the break of her rising hysteria.

She lifted her glass to us, all bitterness that had been mockery.

To Youth and Love! she cried: To all the illusions, of any kind of love, hidden or stolen. And to all unborn of it . . .

She only heard what she was saying when she had said it: it is always so with hysterics, they speak from a need they have without knowing it. Surprise came into her face when

she heard; and it grew into panic. Her body began to tremble as with physical fright; her hands; and the glass fell. The crash released the rest. She uttered a little cry, covered her face with her hands and ran from the room.

We just sat on, holding the untasted wine in our hands. Prue got up first, quietly, stretching her large body out of its crouch on the stool. Not covert of her beauty now, standing with the full light of the fire on its form in a woman's dress. Dirk looked up to her, and I saw him seeing it all—looking to see and seeing it, as if released from his last unwillingness. Prue lifted her glass to us all. Nothing will ever be more splendid to me than this gesture, and what followed it!

Let us drink to this past, she said. Let us fully know it, and only after remembering it—forget.

And she drank a few sips of the wine. Then she put her glass down and turned away from the fire.

This is my toast to you all and myself, she said, no matter how long it takes.

And she walked slowly from the room. I felt as she went: It is good this has happened. Prue will nevermore hide anything, and it was only what she was trying to hide that stood between her and Dirk. Nor will Dirk! And he will not be afraid of what he knows of Prue; he will find strength and certainty in this now, instead of fear.

Dirk got up then, and put his glass down untasted. Yet I felt Prue's toast drunk deeply within himself. He said briefly, Good night, and went out hurriedly—but not after her, I felt: rather to be off to himself as the first feeling-flood of his release came to him.

Still Father sat on at the bedside, letting the disturbance of Janet's words ease away from him in silence. And Kirtley lay with head turned slightly aside. I arose to go, softly,

without saying anything. But when I had reached the door he turned back, and his eyes rested on me.

The night is young in the New Year, he said. Wont you come back and bring that poem you were reading this afternoon, and finish it?

His voice was light and detached from what it was saying. I nodded, and went . . . leaving him and Father: those two!—source and end. It was hard to tear myself, lone, from them: I walked to my room feeling all my weight of being back there in the room where he and Father were together. I felt small and broken and incomplete away from them. I took fright, not of my need to return—this was my one security—but of the time that must come, that was contained in this very night when I must walk free of both source and end, with my own weight and balance of being. Tonight might well be the last time either would call me back, or welcome me. And surely the last when both would be in that room together, as they were now, in a time of their life in which I was included. They would be talking of me now: it was startling to feel myself spoken of, as one of the events of the life between them.

When I had gotten the book and returned with it, I found Father standing by the bed, as still as he had sat there. I hovered with a child's obedience at the door, waiting a command from his eyes to have me come, or to go back. They bid me come, but it was to himself. He drew me into the circle of one arm, bent, kissed me lightly and said:

— Well, good night, Jay. Don't read too long—tomorrow is another year, you know.

For a moment he trembled a little in that firmness come to him. But then he straightened, gave a contraction of a military salute to Kirtley and went. I stood on where he had left me until . . .

— Wont you sit down, for a moment at least? I wont keep you long.

I sat where Father had been, feeling him there, with comfort.

I spoke to your father, he said, all that I needed to say.

And that was? I wondered aloud.

— I had only to say that I had found you in that night of our lives together, to have him understand. Then I asked him what I was to do. He said that he had no wisdom to tell me that, but if there were a question in my mind, then the time of my decision had not yet come. Then we began to talk of Hayes El. I told him of the Goddard place and asked him . . .

Now I had to interrupt: Oh, and he?

He smiled at my rushing: He just said, Yes, I will stay, one place or the other. Then you came back.

I had been sitting up, tense and straight in the chair with Father's own straightness. Now I subsided, to Father's decision made for me.

And you will stay with your father? he asked.

I had voice only to breathe: Yes!

— Even if it is true that the time of my decision has not come yet, and when I go I might have to say that word again, 'until,' and not put any one time after it?

Now with two breaths: Oh—yes!

Suddenly then, reaching out, taking both my hands, pulling me toward him: Oh, Julia, I should not ask this of you: you are young for any waiting. And I have not yet told you what might hold me.

Do not tell me now, I said. There are weeks yet for that, and I would rather give my promise without knowing.

Then with suddenness myself, the first to which I had been swept, I fell onto my knees beside his bed, and my

hands made the gesture of all tenderness felt, touching the dear tired face; and my tears came, and cool they lay on the warmth of my cheek against his. And I knew a rapture of love's expression, almost all pain to be felt, but exquisite. And I was glad to say outright and altogether:

— I love you so utterly.

— To be loved so, is greater pain still.

— Would you have it otherwise?

— No! Less would leave me wanting. I have known it so; less has never been enough. That is why I have searched always for one who would risk the fullness.

— But I must not risk it again in this way.

— It is a sweet way, I shall have it always as the feeling of your words. It is a way I could not myself have asked or taken.

— I know. None of it can be anything you ask, only what I myself offer. I knew from the beginning—it was all something I was taking upon myself. Now my waiting will be this . . .

— But how strong will you be for it, and for how long, my dear one?

His speaking was a wonder, not a question. It was not asked of the moment but of time much, much longer. It was my own wonder of myself and my love, and of the lovely confidence I was now feeling. I drew away with this from him, and he did not seek to hold me. I sat down, a little faintly, and took up the book.

— Shall we finish the poem now?

He nodded, turned his head aside, closed his eyes. And I began: 'The world above in the world below'; and I read—softly and more softly, until—he was asleep.

FEBRUARY

Birth of a Lamb

But the weeks of January were not ours, as we had thought; for the Widow Goddard died in them, and was buried, and she drew our thought to her, or silenced it entirely.

She had been glimmering in and out of consciousness, asking that one question over and over, no matter how often told: Where am I? She was almost wholly paralyzed, but could speak clearly, and so think: not remember, but rather recognize; not string one thought to another in any consequential way, but yet understand each thing that was told her in itself. Hayes El she knew as itself, not in connection with her own place. And her being here was simply where she had always been, in some region of herself. Once when she asked, Where? and we told her, she smiled: But of course! How unnecessary for me to have asked!

One day when Zayda and I were in the room, relieving Prue who had gone home for a few days, she woke up suddenly, and although she did not actually sit up, I had such a sense of her. What I felt uncertainly about her, Zayda knew, and she ran to her.

I am going, the Widow said.

Zayda covered her hand: Yes, the time has come.

The Widow smiled one of those smiles, hardly featured, rather an impression from the air around her.

Let me, she breathed, stay—on—here.

But what of Ben? Zayda asked, for of this she wanted to be certain.

Ben? Who is Ben? the Widow wondered.

You do not remember? Zayda pressed her, to my amazement. (I was all amazement now of Zayda, so calm and certain.)

I—do—not—know—Ben, she said. And then in another moment she was gone, passing from all that she did not know into what she knew: only this, simply this. Watching her, with Zayda to give me her own wisdom, I realized, with surprise, of death: Why, it is only a forgetting of what we never really knew anyway.

* * *

When we asked Kirtley about burying her, not a Hayes, on the hilltop he said: Hayes El is for those who choose to come to it.

We held the same service for her as for Cordelia. Drake came again and sang. Now he was a little more aware of the place, in seeing Kirtley here. You are here? he asked. Again Kirtley took a risk, in face of Lutie's anxiety: Yes, I live here, my name is Hayes. Drake repeated the name, and a cloud of thought began to gather into the simple clarity of his eyes. Lutie grew more anxious; but it passed without yield, one way or another. Drake moved away, toward the piano.

It was still more poignant—having him here while Lutie played and Drake sang. He was downstairs, in the wheel chair, at the rear end of the hall. I was near the front door. Across all the heads bent to the thought of death (her death

—Why is she here when Ben is yonder?) his eyes sought mine as Drake sang: On Christ the Solid Rock . . . Oh, strange song of love!—you give it all your utterance. There are only two lovers in all the world—Drake and Lutie. I am Lutie; he, Drake. There is only one sound and one scene—Lutie hard at the piano, Drake with all his might singing!

By now all the snow had gone, and from under it—wet and in sunshine—the grass and all the wheat and rye emerged in a low sheen of green upon the brown breasts of the hills. They bore her up a hill looking almost springlike under a bright sun. I stayed with him on the back porch to watch the procession. (That procession of wonder in the neighbors: What is this? Up there with Old Hayes, this woman who refused him?) Together we witnessed the moment when—the box lifted, dark outline against the white splendor of the sky—she who had never come home to this earth living, came now to it, dead. As she was lowered into the reach of a wall that was as a man's arms for her—to embrace of stone, kiss of dust—wonder cried through me: Oh, will it content her, is it enough?

Stricken with this wonder, I had to ask him in a whisper:

— Oh, Kirtley, will you grant me as much, to die here even if I don't live here to the end? To be with you dead, if not living?

In all the anguish of the picture he cried: I cannot bear for it to be this way, I cannot ask it! Oh, Julia, don't go on loving me, don't go on waiting. Leave this place, or else—make me come back to it with all the power of love you can command to call me!

He gripped my hand and bent toward me. And for a moment I knew—what power of love there was in me to command and call. How could I not use it!—with this scene on the hilltop to forewarn, foreshow me. And with him so close,

saying: Don't wait, or else make me stay! Where could I find strength to risk such a death for all my love? Embrace of stone, kiss of dust? Where, where?

My answer came from a reverberation of sound within me. Of Drake Parker speaking with the essence of all he was in his voice. I will not take—only earn—only out of myself, of myself earn . . .

* * *

After this one warm day, almost on the heels of it, February came wet and chill, all one driving slant of rain, as visible as sleet in the air and upon the ground, giving a strange geometry of line to the upright trees and hills.

Suddenly Janet could no longer bear it. Early one morning she went off in the car, leaving a note for Father: 'I have gone to the end I tried in Paris, you have driven me to it!'

Father could not believe what she wrote, but he went after her: he borrowed a car and took the road to the city. It was on a day when he was expecting his first lamb to be born. He had me call for Prue to come.

Zayda might be busy in the house, he worried, and anyway Prue has more experience with sheep.

He was like a father expecting his first-born. Kirtley was amused at him.

They can drop them, all by themselves, he reassured Father.

But in this weather! Father fretted. And she must be separated from the flock this morning. I'd feel better if Prue or someone was on hand in case she would have some trouble.

I called Prue, and she came riding up in the rain. She was wet through, and had to dry herself off by the kitchen fireplace. Dirk had been outside, he had not heard me call her.

He came in unexpectedly—she was bending to the fire, she had opened her blouse and was drying her neck inside it with a towel. I knew in myself his shock of pleasure in seeing her—in soft dishevelment from her usual neatness. I could feel him—feeling the first purity of his desire for her, for the warm and beautiful breast within that blouse. And I knew even more vividly her shock of being seen in this way—I—woman myself, embosoming for another warmth and beauty. I had to struggle to recover the moment for both of them.

— Dirk, you and Prue are to stay out in the rain all day with the sheep. Father left word, he has gone after Janet: you and Prue have to deliver him safely the first of his ewe-lambs.

Prue had her collar buttoned up, and was pulling her four-in-hand tie together again.

No use for me to dry off then, she said, if I'm to get wet through again.

But Dirk came on to the fire.

Lambs or no lambs, he said sitting down to it, and looking up at Prue with all his dark and white and crimson charm of countenance: I am getting warm and having a second cup of coffee.

Zayda had taken Kirtley's breakfast up to him. She came in as Dirk spoke. Just for a moment it was difficult for Dirk, it threatened to be impossible. To have her see him in this flush of desire for another, as she had predicted it! And to have Zayda and Prue here together—love immediate and love distant. And how, I wondered, is it for Zayda? Must there not be some pang for the heart, no matter how willing the spirit? For Zayda must be feeling the flush of his love as I . . . It warmed and colored the room as it came from him, with that palpable atmosphere which passion creates

or communicates. For it was passion; yes, it had to be so in Dirk, to overpower the forces of his life against it. Zayda had known—what wisdom was hers!—how love for Dirk would have to draw from passion, not peace, to deal with his resistance to it. She had anticipated this very moment. Yet—must it not be hard for her, at least as memory is hard?

Whatever Zayda felt . . .

Breakfast again, Mister Dirk? she asked gayly. Will I ever get done this morning making breakfasts! Likely you've had none yourself, Prue?

No, Prue said. I came as soon as I was called—jumped out of bed and came right on.

(Ah, Prue, jumping out of bed into action: how vividly I could see this picture of her!)

So she and Dirk had coffee together. Zayda did not serve them; she said she had something to do upstairs. I stayed, only to relieve the constraint in Dirk that was following his moment's freedom from it.

They would have far to go to bring in the sheep: up the highroad to the last of the pastures. Prue said they had better ride. I trembled a little to see them go. So memorable a day was before them, out there, riding in the rain, driving the sheep home.

* * *

I was standing in the east parlor at the window, yearning after them up the road, when Kirtley came into the room. He walked now only with a cane, able to step down on his foot. A few more weeks, the doctor said, and he might go. By the first of March, perhaps.

He came up softly and stood behind me. I was just suddenly aware of him there. I leaned back a little, and he put one arm around me.

— Now what is your yearning?

Dirk, I said, I love him in such a heart-and-blood way, and I want him happy in both these ways for a little while, before the next unhappiness sets in.

— The next one?

— Yes, in those regions that lie always beyond one's last contentment, in any of the senses. He has touched upon these already in himself, but he isn't ready—this is what Zayda knows of him; he needs to be warmed wholly in his human nature first, and aroused, and made to feel it in all the ways he can feel it.

— You want Prue for him?

— Yes, I've come to that. She is just all of woman I could ask for him.

He bent, and I felt his lips lightly on my hair.

— Not content with love for yourself, you want love for everyone.

No, not that, I laughed a little and flushed: Not for everyone, not for Zayda, not for Father. I want them cool and clear and free.

What of Janet? he asked, thinking himself of Father.

She will come back, I said. I am certain of that, even if he doesn't find her. She will come—staggering back. Oh, I know that is hard on her, but she is so dramatic. A woman is in herself, if she isn't always on guard against it. I can't worry about Janet. I think Father will find her somewhere on the way—she will loiter so that he has time to catch up to her.

Good Lord! he exclaimed. You make me almost afraid of woman and her subtleties. Now tell me, were you loitering at this window for a not very different reason—for me to come here?

Almost hotly I said: No, I wasn't, I wasn't thinking of

you this time at all, but of Dirk. After all, I loved Dirk first, and for a much longer time.

He laughed outright and enclosed me with his other arm.

— But I want you to do a little loitering, you are so very self-removing most of the time. After all, it is only going to be a few more days in a whole year, and maybe longer . . .

There, it was up between us! At last, the whole strain snapping.

He turned me around, and held me a little away from him, looking all at me, that he had been withholding. And he said with anguish:

— I'll have to go, Julia. You know this; you know I am not free to stay yet, I have this freedom to make for myself, really make it, and in others, as well as in myself.

— Oh, yes, yes, I know, you do not need to tell me!

— But I must. You must listen. About Vic and the boys. We must see it all through together. I cannot do this alone; this too we must do together.

Then he began—with full release from all past constraint of its thought between us.

He hardly had need to tell me. I had imagined Vic from what Zayda had not said of her but had looked; and from his own bared silences. And could I not know what she was not to him, by what I was? All the words he used now about her but confirmed what I had already imagined. She lives inside walls of impregnable security in her own mind, he said. But this I knew, by the break in himself beyond them. Take Janet's poor little images, as you call them: strengthen and vivify them a hundred times over, and you will have the 'appearances' by which Vic lives. . . . But Janet was every woman at one time or another in her life, before she breaks to the image in the mirror! She is unchangeable!—nothing touches or alters her, and nothing different from herself has

any existence outside! This I had imagined for myself, from what he had implied in the Letter, about his return to her: how, after the war when he went back to her, she was unchanged to his change, unyielding to his break.

But now he was saying something for which I was hardly prepared:

— She is conventional, though it is in a modern way. She allows little flings and excursions, though no real departures. About us—she would be very liberal and say: Have your little fling, my dear, but do get back for the hunting season. She would permit me—what she has done several times herself, within the modern convention. But she would not set me free. I am too satisfactory as a husband on the whole, I meet all the traditional requirements. For remember, what she does not understand about me, simply does not exist for her. You, really, would not exist, nor our love. She would include it in what she calls a ‘latitude’ and allow us a few months . . . Julia, I could stay on, through the summer. . . . She and all the rules of love by which she lives would allow that . . .

But he spoke with such agitation that I had to stop him. I walked away from him for a moment, to recover my own calm. Then I went back and sat on the stool below him, and asked about the part I could not quite imagine.

— But the children, Kirtley, tell me about the children, especially the younger boy.

Here we were at new origins, sources outside walls, the inner sequence that penetrates them. Here—on the ground of his Hayes El experience, ground upon which I had myself come into existence. He was silent for a long moment while tenderness returned to him, and that glow of his imagination about the younger boy. Then:

— The older one is all hers, he was born from inside the

walls, in the first year of our marriage, when I too was living inside them. But the other—Julia, he is such a child as we might have had, you and I, out of the thing in each that belongs to the other.

But this meant too much pain. He eased away from it into other thought of the boy—into little anecdotes about him. At first they were just about himself and the child; but soon I was included.

Little Kirt has a way, he said, of thinking that you are making up a story if you are quiet. Before I left he caught me in my den, one day, thinking of you—how I had left you in October. He asked, in a hushed voice: Are you making up a story, Father? I told him the truth: Yes, I am making up a story about Julia. Then he came sliding in between my knees, just to be there in case I had it ready, and he asked the question I was asking myself: Who is Julia?

He paused, to look at me and smile with the whimsy and the pain of that scene; and perhaps, also, to provoke wonder in me, of what he had answered.

I had to ask: Who was I then to you—who, in October?

For a moment—perhaps from the way I looked my love at him, out of all his creation of it in me . . . But then he drew away again, and went back to his story.

— I had that question yet to answer, in October. I told him the truth: I haven't quite decided yet what to make her; it isn't a story ready to tell you yet, Kirt. Then he made me promise: But you will tell me when it is made up, wont you, Father? And I promised. And I shall keep that promise some day, I shall tell him who Julia is.

But my own cry within me escaped now: But who will she be when you tell him?

My words contained the whole question put to time itself—the next moment of it, or all the rest of our lives. He heard

it all and his answer was—no word, but arms suddenly, and hands and lips, to make the discovery for himself and for me. For the moment then, all identity yielded to the self-forgetting of love. I? Who am I? Surely no one separate from this—and time?—what other time is there? All, all yielded to the immediateness of love. Into the one urgency was swept—remembrance of what he had said of her: She would allow—latitude—what she has done herself—through the summer—rules of love by which she lives . . . And also into the urgency there came—memory of the Widow Goddard, embrace of stone, kiss of dust! Except as I take my summer, this may be all I shall know, too!

And it was this way for him—it was in his touch—for the moment. But then, in us both at the same time: something else emerging, coming clear, and more quiet and more free. It came separately to us, though at the same time. Again I must speak only for myself. It all came, as in the fire: the larger identity, the longer time, the truer inner being. Love, in larger proportions: not for self-losing but self-finding: come to us only for the purpose of freedom—of being free and setting free.

I had no need to put this into any word. He knew, in some way of his own—I could feel such knowledge returning to him, as to me. His hands dropped from their claim, and he drew away, sitting deeply into the couch again, eyes closed, and all of him silent.

Now all feeling was stilled, as unto death, within me. Of its utter stillness I thought: I will never feel anything again, this freedom I have claimed has forever killed it in me. But this 'forever' of my feeling was soon over, when he began to speak again. It did not return in that way which was insensate from too much sensation; but it came clarified, and given an immeasurable gain in being in full possession

of itself. He spoke then with such possession of himself.

— It is our love itself that is denying us, Julia; and this is as it must be: no other denial would be real enough to stand against the truth we have touched in ourselves. But we had to feel what we did just then—the full force of it. I let myself, and made you. For I wanted to know and deal with all of it, and to have you do this too. Otherwise we wouldn't be facing it; we'd be evading or indulging or running away. Don't you see, our love has to create its own morality, it can't accept it from any given standard. It is that love difficult—that only comes to meet the individual in us as we grow in this way toward it.

He repeated: It is our love itself! It isn't Vic—she could not give us freedom just by our asking it of her. I could never go free of her unless somehow I had set her free from me, and from those walls within which she holds me and everything else to her. This is the task before me so far as Vic is concerned. Somehow, when I go back, I've got to make her realize the truth of this thing outside her. Perhaps I shall have to bring her here, perhaps you two will have to meet. Somehow we shall have to make her see for herself . . .

And it isn't even Little Kirt, he said, after a moment of silence in thinking about—Vic at Hayes El, Vic and me meeting: I don't want it to be Little Kirt, either. If my love for you, or even any passion could take me from him I would want it to. I left Little Kirt this time to come to you. He begged and begged to come with me. But I had something to find out myself alone, not as his father. That is why I came as I did. I had to find you—as I did, Julia, there at the door! That finding was due me as myself, unrelated even to Little Kirt. Oh, you do see, don't you, Julia, that it is only our love that can deny us or give consent?

— Need you ask this?

— No, for I am taking my feeling from you, now as always . . .

But in this moment of such knowing together, sound of horses outside interrupted. I rose to it, feeling the moment spent of its ultimate meaning. I gave my hands to help him, with his stiff leg. He took them more lightly, as they were given; and in this way we walked to the front door. He opened it to a cold cut of rain. Through it we saw—the sheep coming! That sight of—sheep coming home to Hayes El!

We stood in the doorway together, long after Prue and Dirk, riding behind the sheep, had driven them to the barns. It was good to feel the stab of the rain and the cold: purifying and good. Then he closed the door, and for a moment held me to him, but lightly.

We have a few weeks, he said, for such happiness as we are free to take, that is ours, that belongs only to us.

I smiled up at him all my returning bravery; and then, with him leaning a little upon me, we went out to the barns, to see about the sheep.

* * *

Through the open door of the sheep-shed we saw them: both were kneeling, and between them—with Dirk holding the head down, and Prue at the other end, reaching into the sheep, to the very womb of it, through filth and membrane . . . Even as we were looking, she brought out two hoofs! My sight wavered before the rest, the actual coming of head and body formed fully, creature from creature, consummation of the whole mystery. My eyes dropped to the ground . . . but only there to see . . . another lamb, but dead—to be felt dead without any knowledge, only what was black and stiff to be felt, nothing else.

Prue looked up to me from the steadiness with which she was working, without breaking it.

Twins, she said. And the first one was dead and blocking the way.

And she twisted a little, and pulled, in the rhythm of the sheep's labor.

She's all but dead herself, she said of the ewe. I've got to get this one out, or she will die. Hold her, Dirk.

Dirk went pale to the task even through the flush of all his feeling. Her words gave her more determination then; she braced her back against the wall of the shed, pulled again, though without roughness . . . Then it came, the full-formed thing, lying long to the horizontal birth of the animal that, born horizontal, so lives, four-footed to the earth.

It's alive! she cried. Julia, come, take it on a sack to the house, before a fire, it is only just alive!

And she held it up to me, black, wrinkled, wet, and only just alive, with breath hardly making any motion in the thick folds of skin.

I snatched up a sack and received the lamb, remembering that other one, that one dead, but this one living! Year beginning with a dead lamb, but ending now with one alive! What cycle this, what meaning in that inner sequence of meanings for me? But she had said 'only just alive'! I had yet to save it!

Hurry! she cried. Julia, take it to the fire, and give it whisky!—just a drop at first. I'll milk the ewe so you can feed it.

Its life was up to me, as life of the year that was ending! I gathered it into the sack and turned . . . He was there in the doorway; I had forgotten him.

Oh, Kirtley! I almost sobbed. It is only just alive.

Run ahead, he said. I'll come as I can. If only I could help!

I ran on ahead in the rain, trying to keep it warm against me. My heart cried: Live, live, live, little lamb, as the end of the year for me!

Zayda came to meet me, and took the lamb when I thought I must drop it. It was really Zayda—I could only kneel beside the little thing on the old blanket spread before the fire in the library, and come back to life myself through it. Zayda smiled at me, as she rubbed life into the lamb.

— You're already writing about this, I can imagine.

— No, not yet, but I'm afraid words are forming somewhere. Zayda, do look at it, it is so ancient!

— Animals are born old where a man becomes so; it is almost sorrowful to see them.

She had given it a drop of whisky: it had convulsed with life and then gone quiet. Now she was rubbing it outwardly into living.

I had built up the fire: it was red on the little black body, turning it purple, that color between the living red and the dead blue or black. Now Kirtley came in, slowly as he had to walk, with care and difficulty. He pulled up a chair behind me where I knelt, and looked at the lamb, long, and without saying anything. Zayda went on working. After each manipulation it would liven a little, try to raise its head, then give up and flop over.

Come on, little thing, Zayda said. Come on and let's live!

And she rubbed it some more. At last it made the effort, and stayed upright, though it still lay with feet spread lengthwise as it had been born. I bent to support the little body on the huge legs.

Now it needs to eat, Zayda said. I'll go and get some milk from the ewe if she is still living.

No, I am already wet—let me go, I said.

I remember this impulse, and how, if I had not had it, Zayda would have been the one to see . . .

I ran again in the rain to the shed. I went softly; it must have been with some intuition of what I should find there, what, through the door I saw—I could not keep from seeing. There, still kneeling—but more closely, and leaning over the sheep that rested, alive, beneath them: Dirk with his one arm about Prue, with an embrace of two, looking much taller than she, and stronger, in the decision he was making for her. And the scene of this decision! The littered shed, the dead lamb, the afterbirth of mucus and blood, their wet clothing, Prue's soiled, and her short hair falling over her face from bending. And, closely outside, the rain pouring and pouring, and the night coming on. Oh, Prue, Prue, what memory you have had to leap in this scene! And you, Dirk, what imagination of this memory! Janet spoke the words for it, but here it is written in its own substances!

I could hear what must have been said between them when, across the sheep, they had reached toward each other. Prue, Prue! Oh, but, Dirk, how can I let you! But you must, Prue, you must. It is stronger than anything else—nothing can stand against it? Nothing, Dirk, no memory? No memory! This begins where all other memory ends, of you or of myself. Then Dirk . . . Prue!

I had to tear myself from the scene lived in its fullness between them. I ran back to the house. Zayda had come into the kitchen.

Oh, Zayda! I gasped. In another moment they'll have the sheep on its feet. Can the lamb wait just another moment for its milk?

She smiled at my rush; she went to wash her hands.

Oh, but surely! It is staying upright by itself: go and see.

Mister Kirtley is playing with it. He will have it walking shortly.

I went into the library. He looked up, he saw something of what I was bringing in, from the shed. I could not but bring it back in my eyes, my warmth, my trembling. I went to him, and sank on my knees before him.

I whispered: Oh, Kirtley! They—out there, with the sheep living, they have found their way to each other.

He bent and held me close against him. And he whispered:

— If only we were as young as they for the full force of it!

— It is better for us that we are not.

— But you are, Julia!

— No, no, I am no younger. Your age is mine somehow, or becomes it. Don't push me away in time as you do. Don't let so much as a year separate us.

But even from each other we were recalled in another moment, by the lamb! It struggled to get up by itself, and this time made it. There it stood, wobbling, but getting for itself the life balance. And in the same moment as the effort of standing was made, the sound came. *Ba-a-a-a!* That sound! Of March, of the year beginning! With it . . . the whole memory . . . bearing in . . . turning me to the little creature where it tottered on the crook of its legs, huge and awkward, literally awkward, with the meaning of the word 'turned the wrong way'—tottered and straightened, tottered again—almost fell—stiffened to straightness—crooked, no, straightened . . . And through all the uncertainty the sound came. *Ba-a-a!* the lamb bleated tentatively, but with a growing demand.

Zayda came in to the sound, with joy.

But now I think it must have something to eat, she said.

I pulled myself up from the memory, and went out for the milk, this time noisily, that they might hear me coming.

Prue, Prue, I called as I went, it's living!

They were coming out of the shed, with some milk in a jar they had found there.

Then into the library before the fire—we four, Zayda gone now, slipping out, knowing somehow . . . Prue and Dirk knelt before the lamb that was not only standing, but taking a few steps before it fell: the funny little black and wrinkled thing, with the big legs and furry joints, and the big ears and soft furry face over bones firm and hard and closely structured. It was suckling Prue's little finger dipped in the milk, and loudly and more loudly demanding more, and a flow of it: *Ba-a-a-a!*

We can take it out now; we must get it to the ewe as soon as we can, Prue said.

And she gathered in the little black body against her. Dirk rose, dumbly, to follow her. Dirk was not hiding it, he could not! Not with his face red from the fire and the pounding of his heart. I could well believe that he had said, as they came in: Let us tell them at once! And that only she was constraining him to her own shyness. All about Dirk was ready to tell, to shout it. Even without words it came from him—so warm for me to feel: the delicious suffocation of love.

They hurried away with the lamb, but, one could feel, it was not only to get it back to the ewe, but to return themselves to what they had found in the shed: to relive the scene; to have it confirmed . . .

Oh, warm and living, oh, life-warm confirmation, that might forever be denied me!

In the morning Father phoned from the city. He had found Janet; they would stay in a few days for her to do some shopping. Had the lamb come yet? Last night? And now this morning another? Good, he would be back for the next lot, though maybe Prue ought to stay on in case he had counted wrong: one couldn't be quite sure. But he'd come as soon as Janet got fixed up. . . . And was it raining out here yet? It was awful in town: cold, just as cold as in the country. It was not any better in town . . .

I could imagine his telling Janet this: Now see here, Janet. It isn't any worse at Hayes El: don't place outside you what is within. Let us acknowledge this and get down to living it through together.

Would Prue stay? Dirk would not let her go! He said he needed help: the whole sheep shed had to be cleaned for the rest of the lambing, and what did one expect of a fellow with one hand? The shed held him, even when she was not with him there. Never had Dirk worked so hard, or so definitely out of sight. It was not that he was hiding, but only that he felt inadequate for showing all he might. Love had indeed come to Dirk, in all its many-streamed fullness. He could not deal with it all before us; he had to go off somewhere and get a balance upon it. Sometimes he even sought to be away from her, too. She would come in from the shed, laughing: Dirk drove me away. He is in a perfect storm out there, working things out for himself.

And in this time—Zayda? I think she would have gone back home if we had not needed her so much. Zayda became quiet with something that must have been unspeakable in her, as it was in myself. I came now into a new kinship with her. I cried in my heart toward her: We have similarly to give up to another, and for a not different reason, Zayda, to give freedom to the beloved one. Oh, teach

me how! Give me your deeper wisdom, your own larger measure of freedom won, to give freedom!

Yearning was to be felt in her now: but not one forward, as mine was, but one backward. Love was a memory for her, where it was only an anticipation for me. Sometimes she lapsed into it: she leaned against the window in the kitchen and looked after them, Prue and Dirk, going out to work together. Not differently, I leaned forward in myself, looking after him . . .

He was making preparations to leave now, he was so much better. He was writing letters, he was packing bags. How I felt this act! Once I passed his door and saw one of the big bags out in the room. He was bending over it with one garment or another. I uttered a little cry in spite of all constraint upon it and started to run down the stairs. But he came after me and caught me up in his arms and held me . . .

— I wont go if you ask me to stay!

But I shook my head. Still I was strong enough, however weakened by his touch.

We looked together then, for a moment, into the time before us.

— Will you tell her about me right away?

— Perhaps not at first. I think at first I must have it all just to myself, even away from you. For a little while, just your letters coming, and my going to get them. It might have to be slightly hidden at first—you must write to my club; but only until I am able to tell her. I've looked ahead, I can see myself running there to get your letters.

He held me away, looked with a kind of amazement at what he was saying, laughed and made me promise:

— You will write exactly as before, wont you?—only more often.

— But maybe so much wont happen at Hayes El this year.

— Something always happens at Hayes El. You will see! Maybe it will not be so outward, but I'm counting on leaving you within Hayes El as never before. Else I could not leave you.

— What are you counting on? Oh, tell me, so that I can count on myself!

He leaned back away from me, against the wall of the stair.

Upon love, he said softly, as love has come to you, through me, but I think—not dependent upon me. Love itself, somehow come to you.

— If this might be so!

— I think it might. Only you must make it so. And I must help you, with every word I write.

— Then you will answer me? This time I shall have an answer?

— My dear one, could you remotely think I would not?

— But can you?

He smiled grimly: She has no claim, surely, on all the words in my mind. Even as once I could write a few books of poetry wholly apart from her, so now I shall write letters to you.

— Poems, maybe?

— Maybe, if you release the strange tongue in me as solitude did, that one blessed year I spent away from her.

Suddenly I felt strong: See here, let me go up and help you pack. Almost I am able!

But he started me down the stairs.

— Not that, my dear! I am taking no chances on you or myself.

In all this time it was raining, though differently—in a

mist, and more warmly. If only it might clear, I hoped, for Janet, when she came back. I even felt kindly to her now, I had love in my heart to include everyone. And I could feel a pity for her that soon I might need for myself. For I knew I might still have to suffer that Janet-part of myself, I had not yet wholly overcome it.

But when she came—Janet, in new clothes, costing all of Father's next month's pension—I had more effort to make, to feel so kindly! She was very pleasant, very airy: So glad to be back. I'm afraid, after all, I'm attached to this place! But I did not trust her. For, as she walked, she still projected an image about her. Now it was one of: Well, I must make the best of it since Larry went leave, and I can't make it alone—I've tried that again and I just can't make it! She was all mild and pleasant with such a decision made, such an attitude adopted. But still, I suspected, it is attitude, we shall have still to deal with this in her. However, for the time it was all right; and the time, the time—it was all I could think of, for myself or for any other. In a few days, just in a few days more . . .

Now that Father was home Kirtley was almost always with him, making plans for the whole next year at Hayes El. Father was to have the Goddard place, too, to manage: Kirtley was going to rebuild the house; but Father said he would remain at Hayes El until Kirtley himself came back to stay. Now he would really stock it and farm it, and Dirk would help, or take over for himself the Goddard place.

Kirtley gave Dirk the work on the house, the designing and building. At first as an architectural job, to get his hand back in it. But also he suggested: Maybe some day you'll want to live up there yourself, Dirk, so build it as you would like it. Dirk flushed with many pleasures: in his work itself on the house, and in the thought—my own house, with Prue!

(Still they were announcing nothing, and we all pretended we noticed nothing—nothing at all though all was so apparent!)

But we were to stay at Hayes El. Kirtley had told me: I would want you here, in any case, no other place but here! And I thought: I can bear it, if only I can stay on, close to this strength of hill and forest. For Janet's sake he was to make it more comfortable, insulate and wire it, and refurnish it all over. She was to make it over, into a house of her own. Janet was flattered by the offer, and very gracious, both in demurring and in accepting— Well, insulation and weather-strips at least, it is so damp.

I asked him what I was to do: what was my place, my portion?

Wait! he cried. And write it, write it all to me!

* * *

All this was good, it was clear and settled and good to be decided upon. But the days were passing, he could walk with only the help of a cane. A cable came for him, saying the younger boy had to have some minor operation performed. She was calling him back; soon he must go, in a day or so more. Each day, one more day . . . If you ask me to stay! No, I wont ask you!

In these days his sister and Brent Hayes came back from the South, where they had been staying through the worst weather. She too made it difficult for him to go, in the trouble she was having with Brent and the land. She was bound to stay on it, he told me, and keep Brent there, or she would have to forfeit it all. If only Drake would take it! Even she was wishing this now: she too—camel come to the needle's eye! The only other way out for her seemed to be through Kirtley, for him to take over the management of

the place, and help her through her worst terrors with Brent.

But he was not free to stay, not yet free! From all sides he had to realize this: his own forfeit of freedom, in an act past in his life as time was; but also, like time, continuous.

* * *

The rain began again, in the same driving way, coming from out all time before us, it seemed: from the year's whole need of rain. It was still cold, but there was something that smelled of spring-warmth, however distantly, in between the rainstorms, in the atmosphere they left—of a sodden earthiness. I wanted him to go while it was still cold and winter. Let warmth come, or any balm or sweetness, let any stir outside be added to that within, any immediate promise: could I bear it?

He must have felt the same warning. One day, suddenly, at breakfast:

— I am leaving today. At six this evening there is a train. It was raining, and cold, and bitter.

Father looked up slowly from his eating.

— Either Julia or I will drive you to the train.

Thank you, he said, if *you* will . . .

He said 'you' directly to Father, and underlined it afterward to me.

— No, you must not. I can't stand it so prolonged. And I want to say goodbye to you here, there at the door where you were when I returned. There I want to leave you, and find you again.

I had to ask: When is this to be? Oh, when, when, when?

The time of my answer has not come yet, he said with my own almost unbearable sadness. And I cannot give it before its time.

I knew this, I knew it! And yet—'today I am leaving . . . there is a train at six.'

I lived the day in a daze, I remember no one hour passing into another. He stayed away from me, saying only: I can't bear to prolong it! And never once reaching toward, or even truly looking . . .

It rained harder and harder and got colder. Father even said once:

— It is so beastly out, maybe you should stay until tomorrow.

But he said: I want it bad when I leave, bad in a way to drive me away!

It is hard, I know, Father sighed, but I can see how you must be going.

In these words he told him and myself all that he saw—for us.

How did the time come when time did not move for me? when—there was no movement except in the rain outside, and that but a ceaseless repetition? Only by the rain coming down a little harder outside could I comprehend that the day was farther gone, afternoon had come, four o'clock, and soon five.

He had begun to say goodbye all around. He talked half an hour with Cleony and Zayda in the kitchen. Prue had gone home: he called her by phone to say goodbye.

Find me another Hilda, he said to her, and I'll pay you twice what you pay, no matter what that is.

Dirk came into the hall as he was talking—perhaps it was to call Prue himself about some official business with the sheep. (Dirk had quite stolen them from Father, watching over them in the shed as a shepherd upon a hillside!)

And for good measure, he said to Prue as Dirk came in, I'll build you a house up here on dry land.

Then, very innocently: Oh, wait a minute, here is Dirk. I'm afraid he is in trouble again with the sheep . . .

We both left Dirk at the phone, but we went separately, he on upstairs to close the last big bag, and I—into one of those short chairs, in one of the darker rooms. Old Hayes! Give me your grip on things, with your feet and your hands!

Janet stayed upstairs; he said goodbye to her there. Father had gone for the car. And now, here in the hall, at the door, the three big bags outside, and he standing here in the big dark coat!

— Oh, it seems as if you were just coming!

— It will eternally seem that way even when—even after I do come back. I'll always be standing here with you, just returning. This is the very essence of what we are together!

— Yes, yes, at the door, but opening it to you, not . . .

— Julia, don't! Or tell me to stay. Even now, say the word, Julia, and I'll . . .

— No, I wont say this, I wont!

But oh, to have those bags brought back into the house, to have all incoming toward me again—the big coat removed! Oh, Love, and all truth and all honor of Love, forgive me this moment's longing—for the coat to be off and the arms free!

I had to walk away from him for a moment. I went to the window of the hall and looked out for a long, long moment. And a prayer for myself rose, forming words out of its own need, addressing itself to a source of strength that seemed to draw near me in the moment: Old Hayes, Old Hayes! Make me strong enough, not just to hold him, but to bring him back, wholly willing and free for the thing you've bred here for all of us!

I had a kind of answer in myself to this entreaty. Not strength, but fatigue suddenly felt—a dropping away from

all intensity of desire for one thing or another. With this I turned back to him.

Just go, I said. Just don't prolong it.

He took my limp hands—with fatigue to be felt in his own.

— You're tired, you're giving up. But I can understand why. Let it be so, if it can't be otherwise. Let it be a yielding of will for us both if not a strength.

Then he gathered me with sad tenderness closely, holding me against the big coat, but not kissing me. He just repeated over and over that simple term of his endearment: My dear one, my dear one!

Yet peace came while he held me, into the fatigue: a measure of it, with the dignity inherent in peace, and the strength. And it was not just with a yielding that we parted, but with a measure of peace that bore a promise of strength. Just promise enough, so that—in going—he took something newly taken, and left me also in this way with . . .

* * *

But now, when he was out of sight, turning from the lane onto the highway . . . But you are gone! I didn't mean, I can't have meant for you actually to go! Oh, come back, come back!

Out of the door I ran, into the rain, down the lane crying aloud and to myself with one voice: Come back, come back!

But he was gone. I cried my words only into the rain and the wind and the night that was coming early, rolling in with the clouds and the rain . . . I stood at the end of the lane looking up the road—that road!—where, only a year ago I had come to Hayes El, as stranger to it. Stranger then, and now this! Now I standing here—bound forever—belonging! But to what end? To what had the year brought

me? Somewhere within me—but where?—I could remember being enfilled and enriched in this one year more than in all other time in my life. But now I was knowing this fullness only by a want of it: by a total emptiness come to me.

Had it happened—any of it? Was not the year a dream in my mind that was over? All that had walked this lane: Zayda, and the sheep, Prue, Drake? Oh, Drake and Lutie, were they not most of all a dream? And Cordelia!—with her triumph of life over death, loss over gain! And the Widow Goddard, brought back smiling!

Road, Road, Road, I cried with the cry wrenched from me: Speak to me again, tell me it was not a dream, speak as your stones spoke before, and all the stars over you! The roots of your trees quickened with life I could almost see, and your trunks strengthened, and your branches spread: it was as if with my own life, that was All Life, springing up and spreading through me. And my thought took its forms as plastic stuff, took the forms of all the life here. Oh, it could not have been an illusion! Road, Road, speak, tell me again . . . and tell me that it is all a greater life than mine, and that I still have recourse to it though I be denied his return ever. This is what you promised me when first I came. Road, Road, renew your promise!

I started to walk back as the rain came on with heavier strokes, darker and colder. I had to seek shelter against the trunks of the trees. Ankle-deep in the soft turf I went: the Road, that lay low and held water, was flooding over. Once I was borne to the ground, the rain beating, the wind striving against all forward movement. I crouched to one of the trees, my hand clutching at the rough bark to get a grip on it. Now the cold wetness of my feet rose, bringing chill toward my very heart. But, as if against this chill, my heart

beat harder, to warm, to keep heart-felt with warmth . . .

Then, holding onto the tree, looking up, I saw: all of it! Lane, house, forest behind, and beside it—the hill of the living dead. Hayes El! It was all here, here as I had known it, would know it again. It was only veiled now by wind and rain and a moment in my lifetime that was blinding me. How could I doubt—with all the teeming depths of the earth under me, body of trees in my hand: very bone and flesh for all spirit of this thing I had felt and known? Old Hayes! Now I cried the name again, but not with timid petitioning—I called now with my own answer: But, Old Hayes, this could not be otherwise since I have come to this place as child of it—of you, who had to give all up before you could possess, who had all your life to wait, and in the end be denied, and yet not denied! For you bore Drake, as we all must bear him somehow in ourselves. Oh, I do see how it cannot be otherwise here in this place, with you as father of it. Just give me time, such time as you had to take yourself, and my seeing will be my living. Let me live in the bone and the blood as you did, until they give up their mystery of other-being. Let me live long here, no matter with what pain. And when I am dead, let me be buried up there, let me give the last ash of myself and my love!

More cold and darkness came, but now I struggled against it, pulling myself up and walking again. I walked, with only one cry left: Only let the words for it all come to me, living words with voice come from it! I asked nothing but this now—the living word. Of Old Hayes and the Road and Love I asked it—walking, ever more steadily, and stronger . . .

Now I was at the house—but standing suddenly still, with head lifted. Then it was, from my posture, from a scene it recalled, I saw how it had to be, differently. Not that warm goodness in his room with Zayda telling her story—

with candlelight and firelight and him there with me, listening. But I here, and alone, and the wind cold, and the night dark and the rain driving and he gone. And yet!—the head lifted to listen!

As if to the gesture, to the effort made, my answer came. All, as before, uttered or tried to utter it: stones, using the voice of rain; trees using the voice of wind; lambs with their own voice bleating it. Not silence now, but sound coming, from a self-told story. Infinity of words coming again, from endless living sources to be written!

Date Due

[illegible]

